

THE ODD ~~MAN~~
FARMHOUSE
BY THE ~~AUTHOR~~
ODD FARMWIFE



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THE ODD FARMHOUSE



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TORONTO

THE ODD FARMHOUSE

BY
THE ODD FARMWIFE

"But walk'st about thine own dear bounds,
Not envying others' larger grounds;
For well thou know'st 'tis not th' extent
Of land makes life, but sweet content."

HERRICK.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1913

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To A.

THE MASTER OF THE ODD FARMHOUSE

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I.

OUR search for a house in the country led us further and further to exceed that fifty mile radius round London within which we had hoped to find what we wanted. Without pause we passed through the purlieus of modern red-brick suburban villas, which we would not have, to the remoter territory of great houses seated in their parks, which we *could* not have. We drove about, skirting the edges of these lordly domains, in the hope of something humbler, but with no success ; and the ill-concealed contempt of the parasites and snobs who thrive in the shadow of such feudal landlordism roused our resentment. We resolved to breathe a more democratic air, where the whole neighbourhood did not hang upon the importance and patronage of a few great families. We, being not petty tradesmen, flunkeys, pensioners, peasants, pheasants, or other dependents, there was no place for us.

I shall not soon forget the disdainful back of the liveried coachman who drove the hired fly at Penshurst, as we drew up before one after another of the houses on the list furnished us by a local house-agent. We ourselves were not favourably impressed. The agent or the owners had lied floridly, unflinchingly, superlatively ; and the dwellings were dreary affairs, flush with the village street, or next door to a public-house or the village school.

On our way to them we passed picturesque lodges with ivy clinging to their gables, and these I greatly coveted. We saw one in particular, standing a stone's throw from the massive iron gates on which it attended. I longed to live there, under that slant roof of quaint angles. What were the duties of a portress, were they very arduous ? Would I merely have to run out, fling open the gates and curtsey, in payment for possession ? My husband had more than once played cricket with the lord of the manor to which this was the sesame, and we thought the casual mention of this fact somewhat modified the disapproval of the coachman's back, even though he had heard me proclaiming my willingness to be a portress.

With dwindling confidence and the day-

dreams drooping, we entered upon another of those zones which lie orbically, ring within ring, round London, like the bands of that saturnine and murky planet. But here the last taint of suburbanism vanished, the land opened up before us, a more buoyant air breathed with the freshness of the downs, even with some zest of the far-off sea.

Surely here, in this homelier country, we should find what we wanted. We were shown several bargains suspiciously cheap. One mildewed and melancholy house seemed to hold the nightmare oppression of some hideous memory, and enquiry, which A. made at the nearest public-house over a diplomatic glass, revealed the fact—not communicated by the agent—that its late owner had committed suicide in the bath. In another house that we could have had for a song, three successive occupants, unrelated to one another, had died of cancer. It may have been merely an unusual reach of that proverbially long arm of coincidence, a strange run of Chance's dice; but we decided not to brave that tradition, though the place had its points.

I was determined to live in none but an old house—an American does not come to England to live in a new one. From the

window of the railway carriage, as we ran through the pleasant Kentish country, I had caught glimpses of wonderful, timbered, Elizabethan cottages, with steep-pitched roofs dropping almost to the ground at the back. I asked nothing better than one of these, with jutting storeys, hanging gables, and roses climbing up the creamy plaster of time-tinted walls.

“But even if we happened on one for rent,” A. assured me, “you would find the rooms tiny and cut up—not one that would do for drawing-room or living-room. You couldn’t swing a cat.”

A friend of ours has taken three of these old cottages built under the one roof, and, by pulling down partitions and throwing rooms together, has made a charming ancient house. Unfortunately, purchase did not fall within the scope of our plans and purses; we must be content to lease.

We grew weary and discouraged; there seemed nothing to fit our needs. I explained these yet again, laboriously stressed, to the house-agent. I wanted something picturesque and old; a manor was too large, a cottage was too small; there must be enough garden and not too much—a large garden is a heavy expense—and I wanted plenty of isolation

and privacy by day, and not to be lonely and neighbourless by night ; and all this we must get for a sum not exceeding forty pounds a year. This time my husband waited outside during my recital. I wound up by a touching appeal to the agent to tell me the truth to begin with, for it was no use sending us to look at what was not there. He confessed he took the descriptions supplied him by the owners, and did not go himself to verify their enthusiasm. Doubtless, he judged it wiser not.

And then he produced the last item on his list : “ An old English farmhouse, fourteen rooms, inside plumbing, an acre of garden, a coach-house and stables, a trout stream and tennis-court.” The trout stream and tennis-court were an unanticipated touch, but it all came under the forty pounds in rent.

Late in the evening, after many inquiries for direction in the village of Kynaston, we turned into a lane, between high hedgerows, and, at its end, came face to face at last with the fulfilment of our quest. It lay in a dimple in the downs ; all round it were meadows full of browsing sheep. A long, low Jacobean house of simple but beautiful lines, with a group of farm buildings clustered in the background. The squat oast towers made the coach-house look like a chapel, and on the

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outside, their bulk was embraced by plum and pear trees espaliered on the walls.

These low, round towers, conically roofed, like pairs of gigantic candle-snuffers, are a familiar feature of the hop-growing counties. Gaffer and Gammer I have since named ours, so like two night-capped tutelary spirits of the farm they seem ; and sometimes when I lie awake, and the wind is busy with their vanes, I fancy I hear them creaking an ancient gossip in the night.

Walled fruit and vegetable garden and lawn and flower garden divided the acre between them, and were separated by the stream. Rambler roses, running wild, arched the foot-bridge with pink and crimson blossom.

No caretaker was to be found on the premises, but the upper windows stood open—magic casements with leaded panes. We peered into the rooms, announcing our discoveries to each other, but it was I who first looked through the dining-room windows and saw the tiled floor, the oak cupboards built into the wall, the great beams traversing the ceiling, the Gargantuan chimney-place, some eleven feet long, and deep enough to hold settles in the ingle-nook. There was a raised platform for the logs, an old Sussex iron fire-back, and a swinging crane with many hooks

and arms. Furthermore, the chimney does *not* smoke—but that we were to find out later.

We decided on the spot to take the place—the dining-room settled it. And, while A. walked a mile across the fields to fetch the keys, I sat under a rose bush and chose and placed the furniture.

My husband came back and said the landlord was from home, but his daughter had promised that the next morning he would meet us and show us over the place.

So we returned to the town, two miles away, where we had alighted from the railway, and slept that night at an hotel. I say slept, yet all through the night, while the great chimes of the church tower in whose shadow we lay, pulverized the hours under their hammers, beating out the quarters in refrain, I was busy with the possibilities of the house. I even waxed feverish over the depredations of the thrushes and blackbirds eating up our raspberries.

Next morning we drove out, and there was the farmer—a typical figure, six feet two, broad-shouldered, mighty of chest and limb, direct and hearty—waiting to unlock the doors. He rents three farms, each with its dwelling-house, in one of which he lives, another is occupied by his married son, and

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for the odd farmhouse he is glad of a tenant. We do not even pay rates and taxes ; these are paid by the farm.

The interior revealed more comfort than we had hoped—such modern conveniences as plumbing and water laid on, combined with the antique. We went back to London, in the first flush of possession, and talked of beamed ceilings, of a mighty fireplace with ingle-nooks, and a secret passage running behind the great chimney, and all the time the mouths of our auditors were shaping the sinister word “drains,” and waiting for a break in our eloquence to produce it.

“What about your drains?”

In the pause that convicted us of this culpable omission, of having passed lightly over the most vital question that engages the attention of householders and househunters, I hastened to announce, “We are on gravel,” having learned by accident that in England, where clay holds the uninterrupted damp, to be on gravel doubles the value of your site, and usually doubles your rent as well.

The stream alone is worth the price we pay ; the trout stream as it is nominated in the bond. And the claim seems to be substantiated, for, in the shadow of the bridge and in the pool above the little waterfall, I

have surprised a sudden flash and splash over the rocks and the shoot of an arrowy body upstream. Of the fishing we have no desire to avail ourselves, if it means dispeopling the brook of its legendary "two-footers," forms of dappled silver, lying darkling in the lee-way of a stone or where alder and wild rose lean to dip their fingers.

On the crescent of the bank I have already planted ferns and irises and bog spiræa, and next spring, I hope, primroses and forget-me-nots and lilies of the valley will make it delicate with blossom, though the last, they say, never do very well the first year. Along the convex opposite edge, I am building a rockery to dispossess the rushes and a ragged troop of water-weeds. The rocks lie at hand, coloured and lichened, the gardener has brought tufty cushions of mosses that look at home after the first shower, and slabs of saxifrage, aubretia, veronica rupestris, arabis and small starry things that live a communal life and do not demand room for development, as do roses and carnations and those plants of which one flower attains perfection at the general expense. The rockery will be the garden's milky way, made up of incomputable masses, a lovely nebula of tiny blossoms.

In the vegetable garden are pear, peach, plum, apple and quince trees, raspberries, currants and gooseberries, to give us the fruits of the earth in due season. It is the flower garden that has been neglected and left a desolate waste, though from time to time patches of annuals or perennials, sown long since, flower unexpectedly in chance places, like memories strayed and half obscured, among the grass.

The dapper young florist gardener, who has been engaged to act as my adviser, was all for destroying the ancient, formal, sweet-smelling box borders. They are out of fashion now.

"How old are they?" I asked.

A century and a half was the very least he could allow them; they were, in all probability, nearer two hundred years old.

"And you would uproot this venerable border for a lot of trumpery things that are planted one year and gone the next? I would as soon dig up my great-grand-mother!" I exclaimed in pious horror.

From the wooded knoll above the stream where we pitch our chairs and tea-table, look out where we will across the fields we can see no other house, only the spire of the village church and the towered gates of

Southwood, that lead into its immense estate. We, also, might be gentry in the heart of our private park. No petty shops in sight, no motors rushing past like comets with tails of angry dust, no tramps, pedlars, hurdy-gurdies and itinerant bears. The cropping sheep in the meadows make Mauve-like compositions all day long, but it is not ours to fight blow-fly and foot-rot. The glory of the golden grain on the hill-slope is given to our eyes, yet we need not grieve, except vicariously, for the harvest, when we see September rains lash down the bending stalks.

Hills surround us, not to circumscribe, to restrict—leaving us large vistas, airiness and space—all our picture, but giving us the frame to it, the setting. On the south they come closer, shutting out the village like a wall, but west and north and east they stand away, some wooded, some barer and bolder, running parallel with the valley, to drop at last, with a sheer line of headland, into the sea. Overlaying them, dim violet hazes, soft veils of turquoise, such as steep English landscape with blues that Tuscan backgrounds hardly better. Saturate washes of atmosphere, azure with infinite removes of distance at a mile or two away, are Nature's compensation, by

which the inhabitants of a little island are made to lose sight of its littleness, and see it large through fictitious perspectives. The sea does it, repaying what it takes of earth with a bit of heaven.

As day by day we grow more used to the place, I try at times to recapture the romantic strangeness that first I saw in it—coming on it in the low evening light, with the swallows flying and dipping all around the house that lay so homelike and yet so deserted, the windows standing open on its empty chambers, and life and thought gone away. One felt its mysterious reserves about the past, the dead, and its old life. History was in the air like an emanation. It is always so with these old houses ; the moment the Present ceases stirring about their thresholds, the Past claims them for its own.

Now and then, in some unusual light, with the mist in the valley and a pink moon rising, I catch a hint of that magic, of cumulative knowledge, legacies of dead decades and centuries, fragrance of old use and wont, poignance of human experience ; I cannot name nor seize it, but it makes me feel so trivial and so transient. What right have I to make changes in this old house, to try to stamp my personality upon it ? the long time it has

lasted before I came, the long time it shall last when I am gone—ephemeral, accidental me !

But there never is a time, as my feet move over the turfy meadow bearing me down to it, be this twice or thrice a day, and I see its two gables, flush with the ground, pricking over the edge of the hill like the ears of a squatting hare, that my eyes do not fasten on it, holding and hugging it, proving and approving it, in all the satisfaction of possession. I think I love it better for being low ; better that the path to it leads down instead of up ; it has such assimilation with the soil, such unity with the land, as if earth had borne it rather than man had made it—like a brown lark's nest, hidden in the grass, and my heart rises from it as the lark rises, jubilant in my small individual joy.

II.

THIS is not the kind of house in which ghosts would walk ; one must dwell in manor houses, moated granges, baronial halls and castles for that. In this simple farmhouse lived homely, industrious folk, happy in having no histories. I can fancy the good wife rising early to look to the ways of her household and being in bed by nine or thereabouts. What would she think of the present occupant of the great four-poster in what was once her room, who never breakfasts before nine and usually at nine-thirty ; who goes to bed somewhere between eleven and twelve, and who has even, on a particularly wakeful and nervous night, read until the cold faces of the small morning hours pressed against the pane and stared wonderingly upon the still lighted lamp ? *She* never had to take sleeping draughts, I'll warrant.

Sometimes I picture her astonishment, reproof and utter disapproval if she were

to look over my shoulder into those two capacious cupboards on either side of the chimney—cupboards I have to call them, in concession to the idiom of the country, but cupboards they are not at all, a cupboard being properly a shallow china closet, while these are of most ample dimensions. In one, shelved from top to bottom, the house-linen—fresh from the hedges where it may have set the pugging tooth of some village Autolycus on edge—once lay in snowy piles with marjoram and lavender between its folds. I, too, keep my house-linen there, but I am sure the gude-wife would frown on the miscellany that crowds the upper shelves, and gaze aghast at the vacancy of those other cupboards downstairs once ranged with home-made jams, jellies, pickles and preserves. It would seem that no woman who shirks the office of putting up her own jams is a fit person to occupy an old farmhouse, and already I feel pressure being brought to bear on me that may force me to conformance.

The waggoner passes, or the shepherd, and if I am in the garden he glances at the quince trees along the stream and remarks : “A raare lot o’ quinces you’ve got this year. They do make fine jam.” Or it is the farmer who goes by : “You’ll be making quince jam

before long," he prophesies. And I myself begin to feel the prick of housewifely pride urging me to a new form of domestic achievement; and the last time I looked into the jam cupboard I shut the door hastily upon a vision of shining jars all neatly labelled and sealed.

But it is the other cupboard, in the recess of the great chimney in my bedroom upstairs, the one in which I keep my clothes, that fills me with the strongest sense of incongruity. The very pegs—once hung with print and dimity smocks in summer, with linsey-woolsey, merino and the Sunday silk in winter—now entertain a pink accordion-pleated tea-gown and frivolous dinner-gowns and other fallals of mine.

However my tenantry may cause those former gude-wives of the farm to turn in their graves where they lie sleeping in the shade of Kynaston spire, resting from hustling the maids, from the manufacture of cakes, pies and loaves in that mammoth wall-built oven in the kitchen; from all the business of the milk and butter, it is not of their vexed shades I stand in fear. Ghosts are not released until the clock hath stricken twelve, and they, who never kept such hours in their lives, are not apt to keep them now

that they sleep sounder than before. Yet the place *is* haunted for me. No doubt it is the isolation, the darkness and silence of the nights, standing round us like a wall, unpierced by a single ray, a single oubliette, of lamp-light or candle-light from any friendly casement—a wall that makes us prisoners. Sometimes, it seems to me that I must assault it with cries and sounds: break through it, tear it down. Partly it's that, partly the sense of History that walks these rooms and passages; of a Past that cannot be wholly dispossessed. For I am afraid of the house, and I was never afraid of any house before. And this fear makes me dwell on small chances and accidents as so many auguries, like the menaced souls in a symbolist drama.

We had scarcely got into the house on that first day and set the doors and windows wide to let in the sunshine and currents of sweet air, when a bird—some bewildered fledgling, I suppose—flew in and clung to my skirts, staring with great, frightened eyes. "A bird in the house—that's unlucky!" I exclaimed. A. tried to reassure me on the score that it was not a robin, but I could not be certain that the superstition I dimly remembered applied only to robins.

A few evenings ago, as we sat at dinner, I

suddenly heard, very clear and distinct, the ticking of a ghostly timepiece above the mantelshelf. There is no clock in that room ; the big cathedral clock in a carved oak case, that Karl and Emily are going to give us, has not arrived. For a while I sat counting the beats in silence, until the thing got on my nerves ; and then I asked Albert if he heard.

He did hear it plainly. "That's queer," he said ; "deuced queer," and he got up and went close and listened. "It seems to come from behind here." He tapped the chimney board and the ticking ceased ; but as soon as he had taken his seat it began again.

"It's a little insect that bores in wood," I said ; "haven't you ever heard of it ?"

"What's its name ?"

"The death-watch."

"Why the death-watch ?"

"Because," I explained reluctantly, "because it's supposed to foretell a death in the house"; and my words sounded hollow to me, as if I were speaking down a well.

As I write them now, in the stillness drawing on towards midnight, I know I have only to brush the curtains aside to-morrow morning and let the sunshine stream in to show them in all their morbid absurdity. The

truth is, I suppose, that two imaginative persons like ourselves should be living in a fire-new house that has no associations. This one has them none the less surely—perhaps the more potently, for the reason that we do not know what they are. A. confesses that when he sits up late he feels my imponderable dreads and oppressions. The house grows hollow and sounding as a sea-shell with the ghostly resurgence of the Past. Strange noises usurp the place and walk about it shod with caution, until they send him hurrying to bed.

In those still hours, obscure and minatory, our concentrated senses fine into perception of the hidden Soul of *Things*—an entity behind the qualities of space and gravity, colour and form, wherewith we clothe them ; a psychic or spiritual entity, united, in some fundamental identity, with ourselves.

The experience we call “ghosts”—is it not the deep memory of the Cosmic mind, impressed by us through æons, that impresses us in turn ?

III.

I DIDN'T reckon properly with the servant question ; I can see that already. An American travelling in England, stopping at hotels where she tips, or is expected to tip, liberally, or the guest for a few days of some well-ordered household, and hearing only the automatic and everlasting "Thank *you*," in a rising inflection, every time she accepts a service, arrives at the most flattering conclusions about English servants, their courtesy, humility and efficiency. I anticipated no trouble.

The shepherd's wife, who set the house in order for our occupancy, undertook to come to me as charwoman one day in every week ; then, if we had a boy to do the boots, and all the washing done out, I thought one servant should be enough for us as the house stands now, with practically one wing of it shut away unfurnished. Then, of course, there was the gardener.

I found out that a servant who acts in the

combined capacities of housemaid and cook is called a "general"; but I did not realize at first that in a country where one is known, not only by the company but the servants one keeps, and where everybody who is anybody has a staff of specialists—whose caste from kitchen-maid to housekeeper is determined by the character of their work—the general servant is a pariah. Usually she serves, or rather assists, a tradesman's wife, and her culinary accomplishment is apt to be limited to roasting a fowl or a joint, cooking vegetables tastelessly, making durable pastry, and puddings of a fearful specific gravity.

If you are ashamed of keeping only one servant, you can refer to her as if she were a dual personality; sometimes as "my maid," and sometimes as "my cook," and people may infer that you keep two.

At first, I thought I should like to have a mature and experienced person—what Americans call "a settled woman." The manager of the Moon Agency wrote me glowing assurances of a "widow of forty-four."

The widow arrived. She was toothless, tottering, with silvered hair, though, like the Prisoner of Chillon, she contended, "My hair is white, but not with years." After

she had been with us three days, she inadvertently referred to the fact that next year she would apply for her old-age pension. She was the victim of monomania. An ungrateful relative dying had willed away to her doctor a little fortune that would have supported Harmon in comfort in a cottage. For years she had squandered her small savings upon lawyers in a futile attempt to break the will. The bare idea of the cottage supplied her asylum in any stress. If I said the cutlets were "cooked to a crisp," or "the savoury was too salt," "Dear me!" was the response, "I think I must give up service; it's too tryin'. There be no need, if only I had my rights. Yes, yes, I'll give it up and take a little cottage."

By the end of the first week, could I have afforded to do so, I would willingly have bought a little cottage and presented it to Harmon. She was quite deaf, and when I rang for her to change a course at table, we could hear her muttering imprecations as she came. The dining-room door would open, and in a dulcet voice, dripping with honey, she would enquire, "Did you ring, Ma'am?" while we struggled to keep our countenances.

She had lived in big houses, where they kept a staff of twelve or fifteen servants, and

she made me feel the mere worm I was, by never suffering me to forget the tale of these past glories. Whenever I gave an order, I was sure to provoke their rehearsal. "Yes, Ma'am, at the last place I was stayin'—they kept twelve servants there—the butler used to say to the footman—the Duchess of Sunderland's ex-butler, he was——"

She had a style as involved and parenthetical as Meredith's, and as ramblingly colloquial as De Morgan's. Poor thing! She felt cruelly having declined upon our humble service in the evening of her days, and she would spend hours, when she was supposed to be working, standing at the back door descanting to the tradespeople on the humiliation it was for one who had served in houses where they kept sixteen servants to work for these "so-called gentry" who kept but one. For a time, the histrionic scorn that rang in that repeated phrase, "These so-called gentry," greatly amused me, but with use it palled and lost its humour; and one day I said: "Harmon, you can't expect me, whose grandmother owned three hundred slaves, and had a slave to stand behind her chair and fan her, a slave to pick up her handkerchief when it dropped, to be impressed by your paltry fifteen or sixteen servants."

For a day or two she was quite humbled and silenced ; but A. was vastly diverted.

“ I wonder what she thinks of the moral aspect of that ? ” he wanted to know.

“ It is the material and not the moral aspect that appeals to Harmon,” I said, “ and what I told her was entirely true.”

Yet her thinly dissembled disrespect of us and our circumstances, was not the issue. She could not cook. Under her short régime we had a succession of pallid puddings and mild, milky messes, more fitting for the nursery tea than for the adult table. Finally, I protested against rice-pudding, but if she must make rice-pudding, at least she might introduce the excitement of raisins into it. “ Raisins in rice-pudding ? ” Her soul was up in arms. In England it was never done. I contended that it was not a dangerous innovation, but she stood firm. In England it was never done. With the punning Falstaff she might say : “ Were raisins as plentiful as blackberries, she would not give a raisin on compulsion.”

Adherence to tradition, conservative opposition to all things new, has kept England full of ancient beauty, picturesqueness and charm ; nevertheless, the spirit may be carried too far.

In the innocence of my heart, I had engaged Harmon by the week, believing it to be customary ; but deliberately I made a similar stipulation in the case of her successor, whom also I received from the registry by faith, and not by sight.

Burt had two front teeth instead of one and, whereas Harmon was grey, Burt was bald and wore an auburn front. She could not have been Harmon's junior by many years, and her eyes were rather dimmer and her hands more tremulous—judging by the china she broke. She, too, was full of golden legends of the aristocracy. She seemed to construe her position as being chiefly advisory, for she left her work to the char-woman to do, but showed an untiring zeal for initiating me into the ways of English housewifery. "You should have this, Ma'am." "You'll forgive me for sayin' so, Ma'am, but the proper place for a dressin'-table is with the back to the window," or "Bein' a foreigner, Ma'am,"—with most invidious stress—"of course you wouldn't know, but in England we do thus, and so !"

A foreigner ! My cordial illusions about the common heritage of history, the bond of blood and tongue and ancestry were thus dismissed. My friendly, adoptive attitude

towards their country it seems is destined to receive rude checks from the lower classes.

Burt stayed just ten days, during which time she burst the kitchen-boiler and broke pretty well everything she laid her hands on, including a prong of the carving fork. I had not supposed it possible, without the exertion of intentional effort, to break a carving fork.

I am sure it is my tolerance of the onion that has helped to bring me under suspicion as a foreigner with my cooks. "Ours is a cold and unimaginative cuisine," my husband admits. Certainly it has no great craving for variety, and had their hearts the same constancy of desire as their palates, Englishmen would make the surest husbands in the world. It is an honest cookery, and may be a wholesome, despite its addiction to suet and to doughy messes, but it is guiltless of garlic and innocent of onions. All is hearty, downright, direct and undisguised ; it understands no coquetries and caters to no subtleties of the palate. Suggestion is certainly the culinary art, and the bluntness of the British cook is fatal to success with the onion ; whereas the Frenchman is master of the *double entendre* and of the use of garlic. I am convinced there is a strong national prejudice against the venerable and nutritious,

even medicinal, family of leeks ; the Welshman probably adopted his emblem out of hereditary spite to the Englishman. Even Shakespeare, who is not a finnickish person, shudders at the garlic-smelling Roman mob. A garlic-eating Italian was doubtless unclean to him, as a pig-eater is unclean to the Jew, or a flesh-eater to the Brahmin, or a frog-eating Frenchman was to the staunch Briton of the eighteenth century.

Our prejudices founded on food, how deep they go ! But the reproach of the onion, like so many other prejudices, arises from sheer ignorance. Horace does not hesitate to celebrate this worthy vegetable, nor to sing of Lydia in the same breath.

I have set myself to acquire an entirely new vocabulary for household things, for I am always secretly irritated by the implied correction of : “ You mean the serviettes, Ma’am,” if I speak of napkins, or “ Do you mean the chopper, Ma’am ? ” if I refer to the hatchet.

Serviettes ! What a vile, mongrel, cookery-book, book-of-table-etiquette word it is. On the whole, it seems to me that it is Americans who preserve the more archaic and original forms of the language, or rather, Americans of the *Southern States*. The “ mighty pretty,”

“mighty pleasant,” of the Virginian to-day, what is it but an echo of the English of Pepys’ and Charles the Second’s time? “Pitcher” is another word I miss from current language, where it seems to survive only in proverbs about the pitcher that goes too often to the well, or the little pitchers with large ears; but so long as I may substitute “ewer” for that abominably general word “jug,” I shall not complain.

After my experiences with crabbed age, I decided upon youth as a requisite in a servant, and immediately became aware of a new complication. It was Edith, who happened to be spending the day with us, who warned me: “Don’t take one with a young man.”

“There are three stages,” she supplemented, “walking out, keeping company and being engaged.”

“Why not a young man?” I protested. “Haven’t the women who work for you a natural destiny of marriage and motherhood, just as well as the rest of us? Aren’t they to look forward to having homes of their own some day? And, if you bar the young man, how are they to do it?”

“At any rate,” said Edith, “don’t give him any privileges.”

“Privileges?”

“Visiting the house or that sort of thing.”

“What are they to do, then? They can’t wander round the muddy, dark lanes in winter, in the cold. You forget I live in the country. In London, perhaps, you may be afraid that the young man will burgle the house, or abscond with the spoons, but if I know all about him, why shouldn’t he visit in my kitchen? You drive these people out into the hedgerows, instead of giving them the protection of a home, and then you are surprised and indignant if they lose ‘the characters’ you require them to have.”

“That’s all very generous and fine in theory,” Edith said, when I stopped to take breath, “but it won’t do in practice; nobody allows it.”

“I know nobody allows it,” I said, waxing in virtuous indignation, “and it seems to me very inhuman. You act as if your servants were a class of neuter workers like the bees, instead of human beings.”

“I’ve tried it,” Edith persisted, “and it simply will *not* do.”

“The girl I’ve engaged is coming to me because she has a young man in B—ford. He’s a most respectable young man,” I said, quoting Annie’s letter. “We have investigated and found that his respectability is all

that she claims, and I've told her he may come from eight to ten one evening in each week."

"They won't thank you for it ; I know, by my experience. I had one maid—an excellent girl—who was engaged. I often suspected the young man was there in the kitchen, but I wouldn't enquire," Edith went on. "I connived at the disappearance of cold puddings and pastries—though cook rather resented it—and I let Mable have him to tea on stormy Sunday afternoons. And then one day she coolly gave me notice ; said her young man wanted her to leave and take a place in another part of London ; it was too far for him to come, and cost two 'bus fares. How is that for man's ingratitude ? And I had been feeding him, staying him with apples and comforting him with flagons—the apples are metaphorical but the flagons are literal." And Edith waited for my sympathetic comment.

"Possibly he couldn't afford the two 'bus fares."

"You are incorrigible," she laughed. "Well, anyhow, I learnt my lesson. Now I take care to choose them ugly enough, as Lord Castlewood said to his lady, but not for the same reasons. I have at last realized my

ideal in a damsel of thirty-odd ; she has red hair, is freckled, and has a cast in the eye. Her name is Medora, and Paul will call her Medusa ; fortunately, she doesn't understand the allusion. He says he's afraid she will turn the bread to stone, and the other day when she passed it to him he began quoting 'I asked for bread, and ye gave me,' before she was out of the door. Naturally, she isn't troubled with young men, though she labours under the merciful delusion that her state is voluntary. She told me she never intended to marry. 'In service,' she says, 'I've a comfortable home, plenty of good food, when my work's done, it's done, and I get my pay. But when *we* marry, it's a hard bed and rough food ; the work's never done from mornin' till night, and *no* wages.' I told her she was very sensible."

"She wouldn't think that if she were pretty," I opined.

If Edith disapproves of my theories, my sister-in-law regards me as quite mad, I'm afraid, and indeed I have noticed something much more like suspicion of my sanity than appreciation of my motives in the young women whom I interview, when I told them of the privileges they were to have.

My first experiment hasn't been a success.

I have confessed nothing to Edith, but I think love *is* a disturbing influence in the kitchen. It made Annie tearful and temperamental. To be rudely recalled from some beatific vision of the future cottage to my sordid affairs was, no doubt, irritating. When a love-letter arrived, I trembled for the fate of the cake in the oven ; when she mistook the imponderable air for a section of the pantry shelf, and set down a cherished bit of china upon the atmosphere, I attributed it in my heart to the young man. And yet I watched over their misunderstandings with solicitude, realizing that the young man was the tie that bound Annie—a capable, if not very amiable, person—to our service.

“To-day is Sunday, and the young man hasn’t been,” I said to A. ; “he wasn’t here on Wednesday evening either,—a whole week ! I’m sure they’ve quarrelled.”

My foreboding was too well justified, and a few days after Annie gave me notice.

“But you haven’t quarrelled with me,” I urged.

“Oh, I can’t abide it ; I can’t abide this place now,” she sobbed. “I hate the very sight of all this,”—with a comprehensive sweep of the hand ; “all this” being the

meadow where they had lingered under the large star of dusk, and the back gate where they had said good-night in the shadow of the lilac tree.

“The pathetic fallacy!” was my inner comment. “The whole face of nature changed; gone is ‘that bluer blue, that greener green.’” And wisps of poetry, like Browning’s “Only my love’s away, I’d as lief that the skies were grey,” began to stray into my mind in confirmation of this apparently universal phase of human psychology.

And now we have another maid, newly come; the fourth, if we count those two “old geesers,” as A. calls them—though I don’t know what that means—in such a short time. This one is tall and blonde, and pink and white and healthy-looking. She wears most ornamental aprons and wonderful caps, and looks a Cybele fresh from the laundry, “rising with her tiara of proud towers”; a household goddess of cleanliness and starch, whose ruffles I behold with pleasure, undiminished by the fact that we must pay for them in the wash.

But I have one concern. She is lonely and she doesn’t take her afternoons out, for the reason that she has no one to go with,

and nowhere to go. "If I only had a friend," she says, and "I didn't know there was no neighbours." So I sit hoping the butcher's boy, or the grocer's boy, may fall in love with her, or eke the fishmonger.

"Why do you never give me your letters to post any more?" A. asked yesterday, "but are always sending Marian?"

"The postmaster is young, and not bad looking," I darkly hint.

"The postmaster is a married man, so don't you go tampering with these people's virtue," he reproves me.

His own solution is far simpler, more masculine and direct, and is none other than to rent the village school-hall, give a party in her honour and invite all the tradesmen's assistants and the domestics of Kynaston. The picture of the sensation this would produce in the community is so delightful that we dally with it.

"No, irresistible as the idea is, we must dismiss it. The church is our only refuge; you must go and see the curate," I insist.

To-day he went and took counsel, and, fortunately, a resourceful young curate was present. "Let her join our Girls' Friendly Society," he said, at once arriving at a seemlier, if much less amusing, solution.

Yet more and more I see the wisdom of Edith, and how in the beginning, before I took Annie, I missed my opportunity in a certain homely damsel who had lived five years at a lonely vicarage, her kitchen windows looking out upon the churchyard,

“The knightly brasses of the graves
And cold *hic jacets* of the dead.”

I did not take her because I preferred a person with a more secular training, fearing she might not be able to stand the levity of our Sabbaths, but I see now that then was lost my great opportunity.

The labour question is eased, as all worries are, out of doors, though the dapper young gardener wasn't a success. He was all promises and no performance, an affable but “most pathetical break-promise,” who was more interested in supplying us with plants than in seeing them thrive.

Fortunately, we made a monthly instead of a yearly contract with him, and in his place we now have “Old Johnny.” His name is Birchell, but everybody calls him “Old Johnny”—his patronymic being his, indeed, only by courtesy, since it is an open secret in this locality that he is the illegitimate son of a well-known county family. His mother was a housekeeper. But Old Johnny

bears no malice. I found him trimming a hedge near the church.

"It takes a long time to grow a hedge like that, I suppose?" I said enviously.

"Well, no, ma'am," he said, straightening his back from a circle into an ellipse, and ceasing to snip, "not long. This be a quick growin' hedge, this be. Nine year ago I planted this hedge—nine year ago this Michaelmas."

What were nine years to him who had so long served Nature that he had come to partake of her infinite patience, her minute preparations, her slow moving processes?

From that moment I coveted him.

"Those people at 'The Grange' are going away. Major Lambourne's been transferred, I hear. Why couldn't we get their gardener? he's—he's such an old duck," I proposed at luncheon.

"I should think Lock with his cloches and his forcing methods and his up-to-date ideas would suit a hurrying American like you much better than Old Johnny," my husband affected to believe. "If you could get an Indian conjurer to come and make a vine shoot up under his hands, it would be much nearer what you want."

"Nonsense, I want Old Johnny. He goes

with this house, this garden, and this place. My heart is drawn to him."

For A. to meet and talk with the old man was to succumb. He came home a few days afterward and announced that Old Johnny was ours.

The Lambournes, who are going away, are not really "his people." "His people," with whom he lived when he was young, and who will always be "his people," are the Carterets of Carteret Hall.

"And what's become of them?" I ask, conceiving, nevertheless, that certain mossy slabs, always freshly dressed each Sunday with a posy (as I now know, from Old Johnny's cottage garden), and certain mural tablets in the church account for some of them.

"The Carterets?" says Johnny, leaning on his spade, "Oh, they're wore out."

A. gave a shout of laughter. The tone, the words were exactly the same Johnny had used a few minutes earlier, in speaking of an unfruitful apple tree he advised us to grub up.

However he may lay his rosemary for remembrance on the Carteret graves on Sunday, Old Johnny is as ruthlessly unsentimental as Nature herself in his views of the object of existence.

"Are they all dead?" I enquired.

"They's some of 'em livin', but wore out, wore out," he repeated, with a reflective shaking of the head.

Verily "all men are to him as trees walking," and his turns of phrase are salt with the soil, smacking of earth. There's no neuter gender when he's talking of plants—it's "He's no good" and "She wants prunin'," and "You'll see what I'll do to *him*."

Often these country people are like the dyer's hand, subdued to what they work in . . . There's old Hood—I should know without being told that he's the waggoner, with his ploughing, plodding way of setting down his big, sure feet, and his whickering, whinnying laugh.

When I produce my gardening books, and florists' catalogues, Old Johnny is at a loss.

"I can't neither read nor write myself, but my wife can," he adds, with a touch of pride in her accomplishment. "She reads 'em out to me. But God bless me, you can't allus go by what the books say. Plants has idees of their own. I've knowed vegetable marrows, that just growed chance-like, and had to make their own livin', do just as well and better than them what was livin' on the fat o' the land in a hot-bed with all you could feed 'em."

“I’m sure you’re right,” I assented, “and that perversity is a vegetable trait. I know it’s strong in animals.”

“Eh, ma’am?” says Old Johnny.

It is only with the rustic, the farm labourer, among what we call the lower classes, that I feel absolutely sure of my ground. He is bed rock; he has the solidity of the compressed, the sub-stratum. He stands, immediately, nakedly upon the soil; his feet are on the earth, and in the earth, and on no rung of any social ladder, climbing up or down. The sky is over his head, and there, simply, frankly, between heaven and earth, he meets you, and his talk is largely of the products of heaven and earth, the green things that grow, and the weather; not of his own products—shop-wares, or books, or stocks and money. Almost the only way you interest him is as a man. His relations are not to society, but to the family—not social, but human and fundamental. His urgent need of providing for himself and the wife and children, that fills his days, and partly his nights—or what is night to many conditions of men—with the long labour of the agriculturist, leaves him no time for the wider, the more incidental relations. Among the complicated equations and solutions of human

geometry he is as the isosceles triangle, with the three plain, primal, uncompromising angles of birth, marriage and death, shaping his life.

But I would rather be a companion of owls; the farm-hand crossing the dusk fields when the night birds are crying; or a brother to dragons, the red dragons of machinery that belch their fire and smoke, than to live always among the little foxes, as the house servant does. The winter wind blows keen, but is not so unkind as man's ingratitude. The farm-hand has one place where he is master. He has a home. The flowers that grow in the little patch around his cottage door are his, and he calls a cat and a dog his own, no doubt. He serves a master and earns his wage, but he serves Nature too, and receives her recompense—in that quietude of spirit, that simplicity of wants, that placid, ruminant content that comes to the worker out of doors; even the tired limbs that find a hard couch soft; the sharp appetite that relishes a dry morsel.

But there is something in domestic service that eats up character, that makes the spy and the gossip, the snob, the hypocrite and the liar: always to see the underside of people's lives, and not to realize they have

a fairer pattern! All of our materialism, and much of our meanness, is turned toward servants, and they must ever be thinking "why you, and why not I?"

We have a boot-and-knife boy. He is sixteen, and well grown for his age, and A.'s joke is that we get him cheap because he has one eye. He gets half-a-crown a week and his breakfast—a Gargantuan meal that combines the features of breakfast, luncheon and dinner, beginning with porridge, bacon and tea, continuing with broken meats and fragments of yesterday's pudding, and sometimes comprising even warmed-over vegetables—for, barring the chance days when he gets sixpence and his tea for an afternoon's work at the Vicarage, it has to last him until next morning. His job is obviously too small for him, like a pair of year-before-last trousers.

I feel that he ought not to keep a tuppenny situation like this, but what to make of him? Plainly he prefers the softer, slacker service to the labour of the land. He hungers after the fleshpots, and asks no more than to warm himself at another man's fireside, and eat another man's bread. And I remember Kipling's story of the child the fairies adopted, who must find his human

destiny with the first touch of cold iron, and behold, the cold iron he touches is neither sword nor ploughshare, but a slave's ring that he picks up and fastens on himself—to be neither soldier nor husbandman, but a bondman all his days.

IV.

UNTIL we had been to church nobody called on us. How long it was before we made that first incursion into the fold it is not necessary to state, but no sooner had we appeared at morning service than the Vicar hastened to call. I must say that his later visits have been entirely independent of our attendance, for he has the good sense to bring no pressure to bear in matters such as these. I have heard that he wanted to go into the army, as his older brothers had done before him, but there wasn't enough money, so he had to take the Church instead, for which Heaven never designed him. Perhaps because he knows this and to keep other people from knowing it, he adopts too apostolic an air. If a vocation is in your heart you have no need to wear it on your sleeve; if you are conscious of the inward and spiritual grace, you will not strive after the outward and visible sign. But all the more credit to

the Vicar for having succeeded in a calling that was not his by nature and bent his heart to an aim on which it was not set.

He came first and had a look at us, and decided it was safe for the Vicaressa. "The Vicaress," said A. "No, the Vicaressa," I amended, moved to Italianize the termination by her splendid Venetian colouring. She would have made a stunning Dogaressa, with her dark eyes and red gold hair.

I think she felt some little curiosity about us. All the other people here are sorted and classified. Those that haven't been here from time immemorial have all had some determining motive, for which one could account, in choosing this locality, such as the proximity of relatives and friends, or the known excellence of the hunting and shooting; for, as the Mock Turtle says: "No wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise," and for two people to appear suddenly from nobody knows where, and take an old house for no other reason than that they like it and its view of the hills, is a proceeding too eccentric and irresponsible for any well-regulated mind to grasp. Even the Vicaressa has difficulty in envisaging it, and the fact that we have not given "the neighbourhood" a thought, nor taken its

social possibilities into consideration, seems stranger yet.

"And you know nobody here?" she asks, incredulously; "if you had brought letters of introduction the whole county would have called on you by now."

I hope the lively consternation that seized me at this prospect did not betray itself in my face.

The Vicaressa promptly asked us to tea, and it is under her roof that we have had our first encounters with Kynaston society.

There are the three Misses Bohun, who are entirely devoted to good works and have given themselves to the poor.

"They'll certainly never be asked to give themselves to the rich," A. says, with that cynical jocosity men permit themselves in speaking of ugly women; "it's the virtue of necessity or the necessity of virtue, whichever you choose."

"Necessity has made a good deal of the other thing," I retort, annoyed with him. It seems rather brutal to jest about these young women; they are so defencelessly plain, with a dull and dreary ugliness that penetrates to the bone.

To me they are pathetic, the victims of an incalculable wrong. Life has sentenced

them in advance, and they have accepted the sentence: they do nothing to reverse it: acceptance is written in every gown and hat they wear. When I see those clothes of an unfeminine utility, those neuter, sexless clothes, drab and severe, I realize they are as much the garments of renunciation as the habit of a nun, and more, for the nun's garb is picturesque. Not a frill, not a feather puts forth a claim. You look at the three Misses Bohun and realize that they know all their ugliness and its predestination, and the humility of that tacit confession disarms criticism. If their minds didn't to a great extent match their appearance it would be a tragedy. No innocent coquetries, no small delightful vanities, no deeper, tenderer hopes! With the whole chapter of youth excerpted, they turn the leaf from childhood into middle age.

They were so evidently made to be useful and have acquiesced so cheerfully in the intention that I quite admire them.

Their mother is dead, and so I can't know whether my theory is right, but I always feel that they must be the children of indifference or antipathy. Love never made them, or he would have made them more in his own image and left himself a place in them.

Our neighbourhood is recruited largely from retired army and navy officers and their families. One fine, spare, soldierly-looking old gentleman of seventy-nine years, who still rides to hounds with the best seat and hands in the field, I often watch, as he canters across our meadows to the meet, with his groom at his heels. He was shut up in Lucknow during the Mutiny. In Lucknow ! It would be like touching the hem of history to hear at first hand his stories of the siege. I have heard them—or rather *it*—many times now. It is a story of how he saw a native driving a goat, and how he, the Colonel, told his men to bring him that goat ; how the native was driven away, lamenting, and the goat was brought and milked into his teacup every morning. He talks about that goat as if it were a sign from heaven, like the ram Isaac saw in the bushes. I dare say it was, under the circumstances, but one tires of the same recital unvaried by a word. With the Colonel, as with Farmer Goodwin, conversation tends to become liturgical, and after meeting them a few times I could recite their part by heart, and our own ordained and regular responses. A. comes away from every visit to Colonel Brook's muttering vague but violent threats

of what he will do if he hears about "that damned goat" again. But I resign myself to the knowledge that as often as we visit the veteran of the Mutiny we shall hear what seems to be his most important impression of a time so memorable, though he casually refers to shooting down natives with that complete sang-froid which marks the members of a superior race. His Indian experiences have seemingly had permanent influence on Colonel Brook's controversial method, which resembles the Duchess's progress through her croquet ground, indicating everybody in sight for decapitation. "Off with his head!" has been the simple solution of a number of historical persons, who have very wisely seen in this the surest way of stopping a man from thinking differently from themselves. Colonel Brook believes in it with all his heart, and disposes of Lloyd George, the railway strikers, or any other inconvenient manifestation by a succinct "Ought to be shot, sir, ought to be shot!" His ideal world would have complete unanimity of opinion but a scant population.

Not that we discuss politics much: the veteran's magnificent military way of cutting himself out of any entanglement with the enemy's ideas is too destructive of argument,

if we were disposed to argue, and we are not. Even A., who enjoys and merits a reputation for the most tactless and appalling candour, has impressed on me and on himself the caution that if we are to live in this part of the country we must accept the Old Testament and the Tory Party with unquestioning adhesion, and there is no scandalous detail of our private life that we more carefully conceal and dissemble than that we read the *Daily News*.

The Tregwells are mere civilians, but they atone for it by living at the Hall and having the smartest traps and liveries. We were out when they called, but we went with exemplary promptness to return the visit, because, as A. said, as we turned into the avenue leading to their door, "I've an idea we're going to like these people. The Vicar tells me they have a fine old library."

And so it proved they have; but the volumes their owner displayed with the most pride were some old tomes on heraldry, for which I summoned a spurious enthusiasm, since A. was so frankly blank about them—the only thing that has ever interested him in heraldry is the bend sinister. But it was hard to fix my attention, which was roaming

after a black-letter copy of Juliana Berners' *Honting, Hawkeing and Fyssbeing with an Angle*, a book I have always loved, not for its contents so much, perhaps, as for a quaint, human, whimsical image of the hunting Abbess who spent the long winter evenings not in compiling a book of devotions or engrossing psalters, but in drawing out the rules and ritual of sport; her text a-tingle with her own eager spirit, ranging as she wrote, as keen as Dian's self, through field and wood. . . . And then there was a set of *De Horda Anglica Cynnman*.

Altogether we spent a pleasant afternoon with the backs of their old books and their old Chippendale, and before we left, Mr. Tregwell took me into his study, tattooed all over its walls with framed and blazoned crests and scutcheons of the Tarletons and their collaterals. His wife was a Tarleton.

"How a man with a library like that can bother about all that heraldry stuff—mere literary flunkeyism—beats me," A. snorted impatiently, as we came away.

"I dare say heraldry does make history full of colour, like a stained-glass window," I conjectured; "but he has been very practical and personal about it. He has married a coat-of-arms."

"I've known men marry a pair of arms, and even——"

No flippancy could deflect me : I was bent on elucidating the Tregwells.

"He is more consistent in his ancestor-worship than a Chinese. He has married her ancestors. Instead of marrying for the sake of coming generations, as the Eugenists would have us do, he has married for the sake of generations past."

"It's just as well he did, apparently," A. comments. "They might have had a lot of little heraldic beasts, rampant."

"She has gules in her veins, the blood that blushes in a hundred scutcheons."

A. says he isn't sure whether it was the gules or the argent Tregwell was after. But it's evident that he has the money, and she—who was a Tarleton—has the family. A man with a craze for heraldry and no particularly crested and distinguished ancestors of his own would be consumed with anxiety to marry "a line."

It is rather hard the line should run out as soon as it reaches Mr. Tregwell ; he has got just five foot ten inches of it, and no more, though of course he has all those scutcheons to look back on—they will never blush for *him*. And A. makes some elaborate,

financially allusive witticism about putting in his capital into the stock and getting only collateral.

It wasn't until we had taken tea several times at the Vicarage that we met the social shibboleth of Kynaston in the person of Miss Merrington. The Merringtons have lived time out of mind at Kynaston house. Why in the present generation it should belong to Miss Merrington I don't know, but she rules every inch of house and ground with an unflinching despotism, and already, before we met her face to face—an authoritative looking old lady, stout, squat, with a purplish complexion, a protuberant person and an early Victorian style of dress—we had heard how she badgered the gardeners, forbidding them to cut a stick, even to clip a hedge ; protecting jealously the rights of clamorous rookeries and colonies of wood-pigeons in the tall elms of the park. Other hints of her absolutism have come to me. I gave Captain Merrington a letter to post.

“Don't drop it please,” I said ; “it's to add to an order at the fishmonger's.”

“I wish the fishmonger had orders for us,” he said wistfully, “but Margaret doesn't eat fish.”

And did not Colonel Brook say to me :

“Poor Merrington! not allowed to keep a dog—lives with his sister, you know—though he’s got an estate of his own. Looks at this fox-terrier pup of mine and wishes he could keep a dog. Rough luck, isn’t it?”

The thought of the gallant old guardsman, standing six foot two in his stockings before Nature took that reef of the stooping shoulders, and once a dashing Captain of the Blues—the thought of him forbidden to keep a dog, like any little boy in knickers, moved A. and myself to laughter, which the Colonel regarded with a mild surprise.

But for the light thus chance-thrown I should hardly have understood a little incident that happened a few days afterward. I had been going through the graperies with Captain Merrington, who cut for me now a bunch of translucent Muscats, now a wine-dark cluster of Black Hamburgs. Near the back door of the house I noticed a kennel with a cushion thrust into it, half in, half out.

“What lives in that?” I asked pointing.

“A horrible cat,” the Captain cried with all the fervency of dislike, and at that moment a large, brindled, sullen-looking tom-cat, that lay sunning on a window-sill, leaped down with celerity at sight of the Captain and dived into its keep. And I knew in a flash that

this brute usurped the quarters of the coveted terrier and was perhaps the reason for the interdict. In private the Captain evidently has his reprisals.

Dear old "By Gad!" Once there were three of them—three brothers—"By Gum," "By George," and "By Gad," as they were locally known, from the particular expletive to which each one was addicted. "By George," amplified into George Vincent de Vitre Merrington, is inscribed upon the marble above the family vault; "By Gum" is married and lives elsewhere; and "By Gad" is left alone with the autocratic maiden sister. Growing blind and deaf and gouty, but still spruce and smartly tailored, still wearing his button-hole, you feel what a buck he must have been in his young days. He has a touch of gallantry, of chivalry, that fine, full-flavoured, old-fashioned courtesy that belonged to a more leisured time, the manner I know so well in survivals of "the South before the War," and that I have seen discarded by a cruder generation growing up under different circumstances. To meet it here in this old gentleman is to have a breath breathe on me, warm with memories—the fragrance of romance. Romance is what they had and what our day has lost. My heart

goes out to him as to one of my own people.

When I say "my own people" I am not thinking of the new heterogeneous South in process of making, but of that moribund South kept alive by a few old men and a few loyal women. I know of no organization among the young men of the South to perpetuate the memory of the Confederacy, but the women, young as well as old, are banded together to pension the old soldiers or their widows ; to mark, if discoverable, the grave of every soldier who died in battle ; to keep up the Soldiers' Homes. Year by year, at their reunions, the veterans grow fewer, and the thin grey line walking in procession behind the carriages grows feebler to march in sun or rain, but march they will ; they leave the carriages empty, for only as they step side by side to the ancient martial tunes does a flicker of their former fire warm their breasts, do they feel one again with the lost and broken hosts that once swept forth to war. They are so touching—these old men ; for as they lose hold on active life the War becomes to them more and more the one great memory of their lives, *the* event. Marriage, the birth of children, or their deaths,—all these personal things grow dimmer, while that red

star of battle brightens once more on the low horizon. I have seen it often. There is Cousin John : now and then I get a letter from him, and it's all about my father and the War. The few days in the year when he puts on the grey clothes with the brass buttons and the soft felt hat that is as near as they dare come to the Confederate uniform—and there never was much gold braid about those uniforms, that grew unrecognizable in the end with wounds and stains and wear—these are his *dies iræ*. And when he dies he won't be buried in the family tomb but in the common plot under their monument that belongs to the 2nd Louisiana Artillery, Company A. For all its iron coating how tender is the central heart of war !

I have a little metal cross—the Cross of Honour for my father's distinguished service—that is my heritage. It stands for four years—four years in command of his battalion—four years of hardship, cold, hunger, weariness and wet, anxiety, responsibility, struggle, danger and death—death before him, above him, around him, below him, all the time.

Both sides were fighting for Liberty, which shows how reversible is the garment Truth wears. The principle of States' Rights, for

which the South fought, was to her the very bulwark of Liberty, which the founders of her Constitution had raised against Autocracy, the undoer of Republics. The South was fighting for Liberty, *her* liberty, the liberty of the Republic ; the North was fighting for the liberty of the slaves. At least, the idealists of the Northern faction fought for that issue, and, having secured it, they proceeded to subvert the liberties of the South by trying to foist upon her the Equality and Fraternity of a horde of semi-savage blacks. The South has never laid down her arms : she has gone on quietly, unconquerably, waging her moral resistance, rendering nugatory the race-destructive policy of those fanatics who cannot see that it is nature and not man that has fixed the superiority of breed to breed and race to race.

The South was governed by the tradition of the rights of States. She had not the vision of future necessity for an ever-increasing centralization of government. She was governed by her past. All her culture, her politics, her life was traditional. The power of tradition died with her. The last stand of feudalism and ancient chivalry was on her battlefields. What she had brought from the old world she had kept sacred and

unchangeable, her altar in the wilderness, to preserve her against the savagery of the new world.

History has corrected the convictions of both sides. Even those who most passionately and poignantly love the South see that she must have lost. She remains to them the image of a noble and heroic spirit seeking, as her right, to dissolve the Union that forced on her personal indignity, injustice, tyranny and wrong, and compelled her to remain within that yoke of marriage, in the interests of posterity.

To an Englishman all Americans are alike; one might almost say to an Englishman every American is a New-Yorker. God forbid! It's impossible for them to realize the vast differences of ancestry, custom, climate and conditions—all the elements of life—that distinguished two great sections of a country (three great sections, including the West that came later) from each other, distinctions that yet hold though we grow so much more homologous. The misconception comes home to me forcibly when I hear myself called a Yankee. "She's a Yankee," I overheard Colonel Brook say to his wife the day he first met me. "Doesn't talk like one, though, eh?"

To the Englishman also all Americans are

commercial. He doesn't seem to know that a generation ago throughout the South to be in trade was a far greater social stigma than it is to-day in England. A landed gentry bereft of their lands or the means of cultivating them turned to the three professions for themselves and their sons, until the South was populated with lawyers, doctors and clergymen trying to live by one another. And long and sturdily they starved before they could accept the new régime.

At least A. and I leave the fact that I'm an American to stand without apology, unlike poor Mr. Falconer of The Grange, whose wife is a Colonial, and who goes about submitting in extenuation that she comes of "such very good stock," as if she were a prize pig or a pedigreed cow.

The other day at the Vicarage I happened to drop a name into the talk. "Devereux?" murmured Miss Bingham; "why, that's one of *our* names! Do you have it in America? How odd! And there's another name I heard you mention—Thornhill. Do you have that, too? Really? It's a very good name—one of our county names."

Unfortunately, I can't reproduce the accent. But a more delightful utterance was forthcoming. Presently, à propos of nothing

at all that had been said, Miss Bingham leaned forward impressively to confide.

"Do you know, recently I saw it stated that the Pope is the son of a peasant. *Can* that be true?"

And when this humiliating discovery had to be confirmed, she still demurred.

"But I thought they chose a cardinal or bishop? I cannot understand how a person of low origin—"

A wild desire came over me to say: "The Holy Ghost should really be more careful where it alights"; but the Vicar was there, and I dare not. Poor Miss Bingham! she has lost all respect for the Pope.

And then there is the family we really like. We were long in meeting them, for they are not to be met at afternoon teas, and they go to few places, but at last they heard of us and called. "We don't go out," they said, "because we can't entertain." It's like them to say it, like their simplicity, their stark sincerity. They are quite hard up. Gone, more than a century ago, the noble Hall built by their ancestor, Sir William, who figured on the Field of the Cloth of Gold—gone in smoke and fire. A dozen or more of its one-time owners sleep in their parish church; there is the fine knightly brass of the Sir Thomas

who marshalled four thousand Kentish men within twenty-four hours and led them to Northbourne Down when the cressets along the south coast flared a warning of the Armada's approach; and there his three wives kneel in marble on his sarcophagus, the first, with her train of seventeen progeny, shaming the barrenness of the other two that look like tailless kites. And there is the monument of Sir Leonard, the historian. Nobody but a soldier would have sunk the small patrimony that had come to him as the residue of all this greatness in South American Rails, at any rate not in those particular South American Rails controlled by a notoriously rascally set of financiers. The energy of the General's small brown wife seems concentrated on keeping him from flinging the remainder of his inheritance after that which is gone, in the effort to retrieve his fortune; on holding in check the General's sanguine schemes, and on placing in life her five daughters—not in marriage—though they are so rosy and wholesome I am sure they will find their way to that destiny sooner or later; but meanwhile they have all been equipped to teach something. Two are at school still; three are finished and sitting on the rail, ready for flight.

We like them all because, as I have said, they are so simple, so unassuming, so cordial and sincere—qualities one meets in English officers and their families who have lived long in India.

I am interested to hear from time to time the story of the acquisition of a piece of brass or a jade bowl, but it is when the General's wife tells the story of the bearskin rugs that her eyes really shine with recollection; tells how she and the General—he was captain then, for it was a long time ago, before the advent of the eldest of the five, and the bearskins are beginning to get slightly rubbed and mothly, with the carefulest of wear—how she and her husband tramped and climbed in Kashmir, high above the valleys, in mid-air, driving their meat and milk with them on the hoof; how she wore a short fringed tunic and trousers made of a shawl, leather stockings and grass sandals that her bearers wove new every night, setting at nought the march of civilization—evolution, even—and plying a prehensile great toe. Her hair was short, shorn after enteric, and needed no care.

“Heaven,” says the General's wife, “Heaven will be Kashmir, a shawl for clothing, and plenty of bear.”

“You were brave,” I answer, meaning it, too, in another unspoken sense that recognizes the temerity of the woman who could thus appear in the eyes of a newly-married husband, with cropped head and straw-sandalled feet, in a collarless, shapeless sack of camel’s hair. In heaven, I thought, the difficulties of feminine existence may be reconciled, and the comrade need not cast out the mistress, nor the mistress be preserved at the comrade’s expense.

V.

SOMETIMES I long impatiently to turn the wheel of the seasons forward a spoke or two, that the hour may arrive for planting roses and clematis and the blessed bulbs. It is hard to sit waiting for the season ordained for doing things when there is so much to be done. It is all plain before me, like a picture, and I contemplate the garden that is to be, until it gets so real I waken with a start to the garden that is.

The west garden wall must be covered with roses: Gloire de Dijon, climbing Caroline Testout, Frau Carl Druschki, the old Fortune's Yellow, alternated with mauve and purple clematis Jackmanni. Over the doorway porch I shall train Carmine Pillar roses, and on the sunny south wall of the house I'll try the climbing *Devoniensis*, dear to my childhood. Exquisite are its buds, with silvery outer petals and pinky porcelain hearts. I have gathered them by the basketful,

standing high on a ladder. I cannot hope for anything like that here, and it is scarcely worth while trying Maréchal Niel and Marie Henriette. No one can dream what they are who hasn't seen them in New Orleans: Maréchal Niel trailing a tapestry of solid gold from balcony to balcony, the pale purple smoke of wistaria enwreathed with it; or trellises of the odd, unmatched red of newly-opened Marie Henriettes against the same value of deeply, vividly blue sky. What a fruity fragrance this rose has—but one serious defect; the flowers do not keep their colour, and the mortified magenta hue of the older blossoms is as dull as their youth is bright and beautiful.

To return to here and now—or rather, here and next year. The garden wall, cutting off the kitchen wing from the lawn, is to have ramblers grown against it, pink and crimson, carried up on a trellis as they grow higher, with pink ivy-leaved geraniums trained flat in the spaces between. The ugly fence is to be hidden by a hedge, and between the gravelled walk and the stream I mean to have a bed of lovely little polyantha roses, backed by a hedge of sweetbriar. The edge of the lawn by the stream is to be sown thick with daffodils, snowdrops, blue scilla

and narcissus: a broad ribbon running as far as the footbridge. The regular way in which the trees are planted on this bank gives one the opportunity for a charming effect. I have already had their branches trimmed up in anticipation, and at the root of each tree I intend planting a Dorothy Perkins: the roses will run up the trunks and then be carried on chains, in a series of festoons, the last flowering loop being caught to the rose-grown arbour over the bridge. When the late narcissi have shrivelled in the grass, the roses will begin; and when the roses are spent, the brilliant *Tropaeolum Speciosum* planted with the ramblers will creep like a slow flame along the garlands. In the rockery's sunnier space there will be saxifrages, sun roses, alpine pinks, *heuchra sanguinea*, *alyssum*, dwarf campanulas, aubretia, double white arabis, small irises, veronica, the lovely silken portulaccas; while in the shadier stretches between the trees I'll have mossy things, primulas, anemones, hepaticas, dog-tooth violets, gentians and candytuft. A lovely fledging for the hither bank of the stream they will make—the bulb things, the roses and the rockery! The opposite crescent of bank is so completely shaded by the lilacs that I have not much choice as to

what I shall grow ; chiefly, it will be a mass of ferns and wild primroses until we get clear of the lilacs and near the bridge. Then I might have clumps of *Iris Kæmferi* on the bank, and the commoner irises : bog spirea, water-buttercups (there are lots of them growing wild by the mill) on the bog that will form, in spite of all one's efforts, in the slack where the bank curves. Some discerning person has put rushes there, and they come delightfully into the picture.

From the footbridge to where the stream pours in from the meadow through the west garden wall in a lilliputian cascade, is a straight stretch of water, shallow, sun-dappled, swift, over the pebbled bottom, and broken into tiny rapids by the stones. The lip of the lawn is low there, yet might be slightly terraced and set thick with forget-me-nots. On the other side the knoll drops steeply to the stream. There is a long drooping fern one sees clothing the sides of Devon lanes, that is the very thing for the bank's edge. Half-a-crown will buy a hundred or so from some florists. We have cut away shrubs and scraggy growths until the whole slope of the knoll is now in view from the lawn and the house. A shrubbery of rhododendrons near the top would be wonderful, but

they require a specially prepared soil, and I'm afraid that is too ambitious as yet. The ground there is covered with the leaves of wild celandine, wild white violets, and wild anemones; and there are wood-ferns too. I shall add snowdrops, the cheaper sort of daffodils that one buys by the thousand, lilies of the valley, hepaticas, anemone japonica, the white wood-lily, *Trillium grandiflorum*. I have already dug up a lot of wild hyacinths from the woods and planted them—and a stiff job it was. I took the boy with me, and got impatient because he broke so many; and then I tried. The bulb is a small, pallid thing, living in the bowels of the earth with a tail like a comet. I believe it was Persephone's flower, and started to follow her, for it seems to have got halfway to Hades.

On the very summit of the knoll stand four tall chestnuts planted symmetrically at the four corners, as it were. Two of them are lusty tents of green, and have waxed great and prospered at the expense of their brethren; and the other two, having had all their sunshine stolen, have slowly died, and stand there bleached, bone-bare and naked, like the poor man contrasted with the rich man in the parable. The dead ones have been topped, and I intend repeating the

rambler roses festooned on chains from trunk to trunk to form a sort of pavilion. The ramblers won't live longer than two or three years where they get so little sunshine, but they can be replanted from cuttings.

I have conceived the bold idea of turning the entire garden beyond the stream, that is now devoted to vegetables, into grass plats and flowers, making it an approach to the house. We could easily take in another half-acre or more of garden near the coach-house, as that portion is already devoted to vegetables as well as to fruit. It would be only a matter of cutting a gate in the hedge and paying a pound or two of additional rent; for I am sure the farmer would gladly acquiesce in the arrangement, since the small adjoining field seems to serve no purpose than to act as an occasional isolation camp for sick sheep.

The new flower-garden will retain its general plan of four plats made by the quartering of two paths that intersect in the form of a Greek cross. The plats will be sown with grass-seed and mowed and rolled until they are lawns, and all along the paths the narrow herbaceous borders will riot with a perfect orgy of annuals: the kinds that may be raised from seeds in penny or threepenny packets. By the path leading from the gate

to the bridge I shall have standard roses, and I should love to have the glorious tree-peonies, if the prices were not prohibitive to us. On either side of the main path beyond the cross-path's intersection, I shall plant sweet-peas, so that one walks between walls of colour. The back of the garden is the place for sunflowers, hollyhocks and Michaelmas daisies, and perhaps in time some tiger-lilies near the sunflowers. In the herbaceous borders there will be godetias, sweet-williams, sweet sultans, phlox, Sinkins pinks, mignonette, gypsophila, stocks, larkspurs, and choicer delphiniums, aquilegia, verbenas, marigolds, asters of sorts—the Comet, Ostrich Plume and Victoria varieties ; wall-flowers, of course, in the spring, nemesia, penstemons, marguerites, the single chrysanthemum Morning Star, and salpiglossis, with their petals veined and clouded like the wings of moths—all the dear flowers one can afford to sow broadcast in handfuls. Nasturtiums are barred : the kitchen walls and the trellis outside the coal shed are appropriated to their culture ; they are not allowed in the polite society of the garden. The line is drawn for them, and that line is the brick wall that divides the front lawn from the back.

It is in the west wall border and along the

front that we shall put our best and most expensive foot forward; in spring these borders will be a mass of bulbs: daffodils, hyacinths and tulips; and afterward one will harbour named geraniums and begonias, the other carnations and lilies and Kelway delphiniums.

While I sit straddling a whole season from one summer to the next, and painting the garden of my desire, A. is off on his bicycle exploring the country, finding little hamlets the railway has not touched: some ruined abbey, or a crumbled castle with cottages built into its wall and cattle in its court. But even these places have been seen and assimilated to his purpose by the ubiquitous postcard artist.

A. buys a card, addresses it to me in a disguised hand—he has the makings of a first-rate forger—and sends it with a message purporting to come from “Harriet” or “Mabel.” He first played this trick when I was changing maids, and he had some amusing moments while I puzzled over a communication from one Jane Burdock, saying she was sorry, but she could not keep her appointment with me for the next afternoon. I professed I knew nothing of Jane and had no appointment, and

speculated could she have written and I failed to receive her card, A. making suggestions and asking questions with misleading gravity and innocence.

It does seem stupid, but he had practised the same prank several times before I detected it; his most successful bait was an application for employment from "yours fondly, Mary Richardson." The manner of the signature settled Mary's chances, and I became quite heated over her ignorance or impertinence—I wasn't sure which. A. enjoyed himself very much that time. He hasn't spoiled his joke by repetition until yesterday, when, having seen a fine old-timbered house, he sent me a card with a picture of it; but he puzzled no one unless it were the postman—the postman must often find a stimulus in our correspondence, I think—or the maid, for this missive, with its inscription, "Can you meet me to-morrow? With love—Alice," was discreetly tucked away at the bottom of the master's morning pile of letters, as though Marian thought the "Mrs." an inadvertence and was wishful to spare my feelings.

VI.

LAST night I could not sleep, but I enjoyed my vigil. In the city, except in winter, there seems no such thing as profound unconsciousness; a thousand human importunities, however muffled and indistinct, come knocking at the doors and windows of the house of sleep; a thousand lighter noises come fluttering round its eaves. During a wakeful night in London, my sensitiveness to these deepens until I am brought to feel that I have my ear pressed close against the Tree of Life, that I can hear the currents flowing up and down its trunk; the stirring of its countless living leaves as dreams breathe through them; the scuttling of noisome and destructive insects behind its bark.

“The City of Dreadful Night”—one does not think of the country of dreadful night—somehow night is not dreadful in the country. London doubles the pains of your insomnia; itself a great heated brain that cannot get to

sleep, with the blood still beating in it, and feverish lights that never close their eyes. Here the cottage candles are extinguished; the meadow is a dormitory with many sheep, like big, peaceful, white pillows, scattered about it; the sky has a clear and open mind full of the steadfast thoughts of stars.

In town my nocturnal imagination plays the detective, pursuing and investigating sounds. I hear a solitary footstep on the pavement, and invent sensations as fast as the Yellow Press; a late hansom clatters down the street, and I weave romance about it. It stops next door, and I follow its occupants step by step; I fumble with them for the fare; I grope with them for the keyhole. My febrile fancy will not lie abed, but goes questing here and there like a lost dog on the trail of passers-by.

For one thing, there is never the cool, velvety dark of the country—those fresh airs that stroke the raven down of darkness till it smiles, as Shakespeare says, in what, for all its sonorousness, I have always regarded as a hopelessly mixed metaphor. The city is a phosphorescent thing living in its own light. You have but to look at it from some high point on the outskirts, to see how far its

glare strikes into the sky, blinding the bright eyes of heaven, blotting out the floating scarf of Milky Way, hiding the fine shadings, the innumerable gradations of greys and blacks. For the country knows no real blackness, unless it be when there's a fog; its deepest darkness does not fall from the sky, but rises from the earth; it is when it's "ground dark" that men lose their way.

Night grows so diaphanous in summer that it is no substantial fabric, but a mere tissue, a tenuity of twilight on which the trees emboss their thicker patterns. The daylight merely has a little doze before it's time to be up and doing again. I wonder the birds don't die of nervous prostration, they get so little rest. I know they are tuning up at two o'clock in midsummer, and in good voice by half-past—the larks flying in the sky like singing shuttles weaving the web of dawn; the swallows flickering and gurgling, most insomnolent of the tribe, for they follow the summer; they have no winter, no season of sleep.

It seems so foolish, so sluggish, to turn on my pillow, even though the clock chimes only four, and nurse myself to sleep again. The day is here, and all the creatures the

day summons are awake. The sun comes and breaks the first lance upon the golden shield of grain that lies beyond my window, the acres of ripened wheat blazing and reflecting like a salver of burnished brass.

Had I lived when Thomson published, I would have sent him a ticket and an invitation to the country, and all his town-bred interpretation would have vanished; perhaps after a week or two of country life he might have written a poem in praise of sleeplessness, full of the dewy scents of night. The awful spirits of the Waking Hours might have come to him in gentler shapes, with gifts in their hands, roses of sunrise, the gold goblet of the dawn.

He was spared the clanging tram and shrieking tube that would have intensified his agony. But only in the heart of a city could he have reared that shrine of verse to the arch-deity of Insomnia and Insanity; that image with red eyes and burning lids apart, and brain of furnace fire in which devilish fancies are hammered at the forge.

He was chief ministrant of that pitiless goddess, and Rossetti also served in her temple; the censers of their song light up her sombre face. Once, I remember, I read

Thomson's page, on the homœopathic principle, through a sleepless London night. But here—here I rise, slip on a dressing-gown, and go down into the garden to gather the first, most fragrant hour of the day.

VII.

THE swallows are gone ! This morning I could not think at first what it was I missed, why the sky was so void overhead. I felt a want somewhere, and then suddenly I knew the swallows were gone. . . . When the hops were being dried, filling the air with pungent sweetness, when the wains were passing back and forth bringing in the wheat, when I heard the thresher whirring yesterday and the day before, I knew all these for signs and to what they pointed ; but nothing seems to clinch this significance so much as the disappearance of the swallows. Between the going of the swallows and the coming of the cuckoo lies a long blank, and all "the sweet o' the year" is on the other side of the balance.

They went so silently, it is like a betrayal ; they who shared our fireside, or at least our chimney-side all summer, using it as a nursery, the parents flying up and down with a

noise I loved to hear, a noise like gusty flame. Two of the young birds, seeing light at either end of the black funnel, became confused and flew down instead of up. I found them clinging to the dining-room windows, and captured and launched them in life.

I did not hear "The pilgrims of the year wax very loud in multitudinous chatterings," but on several chilly mornings lately I have seen them flattened against the tiles of the barn, basking like kittens in the sunshine. I thought a day like this must surely have tempted them to stay. By to-morrow our fair-weather friends will probably be clinging to the eaves of a Pyrenean chateau or selecting a top-floor flat for the winter in the white cliffs of southern Spain. No—not fair-weather friends, warm weather friends: they dearly love a storm; the wind fills them with the same pride of flight you see in the filling canvas of a sailing-ship. They scud before it, wheeling, trimming, coming round in its teeth. When other birds huddle in the coverts they mount the gale, topping a thunder-cloud, uttering cries of delight, planing down again with a long glide that the aviator copies—to his doom.

I think the swallow has more conscious aerial joy than any other bird: yes, even

than the lark. The lark expresses it in song, the swallow can only express it in flight; his little gurgling song is too inadequate. He has the most exultant sense of space; a wood or coppice would stifle him; he must have the open. You can see him sweeping the English fields with something of the illimitable desire of the desert in his wings: desire he brought with him from Egypt and the sands. By now he is fulfilling it again.

The cowl of the oasts were the swallows' favourite seat, as thick as they could crowd in a row; and already the starlings are beginning to take their places. I never saw a starling there until the swallows had gone.

"Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow."

This is not a bedside adjuration to take physic: it sounds a little like it detached from its context; but the beginning of that most splendid of all invocations of the swallow, the lyrically moving music of which is so dramatically broken by the sudden stroke, the pictured horror of the line:

"Are not the roofs and the lintels wet?"

And the whole of the last verse voicing the cry of the child's blood—

"Who hath remembered me? Who hath forgotten?"

Almost unmatched, it is, for dramatic power in lyric poetry.

Was it indeed the restlessness of the flitting swallow forever flying from a memory, that the Greek coupled with the nightingale's sorrow, in that old, too terrible, too tragic story of Itylus ?

“ Sister, my sister, O fleet, sweet swallow
Thy way is long to the sun and the South.”

The sun and the South ! Do they make me wistful ? Not yet at any rate. I wouldn't part with one of these October days. On damp afternoons we can go mushrooming in the meadows ; on drier days we walk in Southwell Park, with the rustling of fallen chestnut leaves round our feet. In the stubble the partridges and pheasants get up before us explosively, but in these tidy English fields Nature is guilty of no importunate mendicancy, waylaying you shamelessly like a strumpet in the interests of her affairs, catching at the skirts of opportunity.

At home I used to return from an Autumn ramble like the fretful porcupine, a mass of sharp brown needles, covered with every shape and sort and size of vegetable barb, dart, quill, prickle ; weeds, too, that had been comely in their flower, as if love had given

place to the tenacity of marriage—tenacious in the one great object of the propagation of the species.

I am so glad that we have hills round us. A flat country is bearable only where it is vast, like the desert or the Western plains, or has the largeness of the sea lent to its edge. A hill gives you a touch of the infinite: it is literally an exaltation of the landscape. Sunrise and sunset have a finer flare when they are “hill-crest fires”; a touch of mystery when the sun’s moment of exit or entrance is hidden from us. The earth’s profile is sharpened into more significance than the bland round of her full face. And lifted up against the gold, as if for us to see, a dark figure moves—a man returning from his work. In the largeness of the evening earth that figure becomes a symbol, a sacrament, like an elevation of the Host, the bread of life embodied in its earner; and to him night brings the chalice, the spiritual and renewing wine of sleep.

These are very gentle hills: they have a worn and aged look. The wildness was long ago taken out of this coastal country. It has been too long a thoroughfare to London. The alighting board of the hive, it is worn smooth. As scenery it is negligible; I

confess so to myself, contrasting it with that which I know of Virginia and North Carolina. Yet that scenery is like the beauty of some splendid savage woman; it goes no deeper than the eyes. What is the charm of this quiet English country, what but its saturation with humanity, that draws the heart of him who looks on it into his gaze and makes him feel its clay is kindred with his own. These fields man has ploughed with his labour, sowed with his hopes, salted with his sweat, till they are humanized. There's not a field in England but has its name, and some names stand on the Pipe Rolls or in Domesday Book. Man has given them personality, and they have given in turn to him something essential of themselves, just as more materially every year men take from the soil and give back what they've taken. It's hard to say which has the most to do—men with making the land or the land with making men. Ruskin was very scornful of any theory of Nature's sympathy with us, and in the sense that she pursues her eternal way, wrung by her own convulsions but untouched by ours, he was right; but the surface of her soaks up impressions of our human lives as blotting-paper soaks up ink.

During the first summer that ever I spent in England, A. and I were lunching at the inn in a little town of Somersetshire, close to the Devon border, close to the sea. A plain four-square house, flush with the street, on which its front door opened under a shallow porch. Indoors the walls were covered with old prints, old pewter, old china. When we had reached the end of our meal, the waitress asked if we would have coffee in the garden. We followed her, wondering, up half a flight of stairs, then up the second half, and into a long passage that looked down into a little court. All the walls of that court were timbered; carved corbels thrust out their heads and craned their necks from above to see into it; dwarf narrow doors gave on to it from panelled rooms. What was once the monks' stone buttery opened from it, and a recess hollowed in one of the timbers and covered with a pane of horn, marked where they had set the taper to light them in crossing that small court.

We went along the passage to its end and came out suddenly on the hillside into a garden walled. The borders were brilliant with flowers, butterflies floated, bees hummed, swallows dipped and skimmed, poplars twinkled their topmost leaves in the

sun. A few clouds, slipping their white garments from them, melted bodily into the blue, as a bather into ocean. To the right the old castle of the Luttrells on its height, to the left a round tower on the hill. The wall at the back was low, so that you might look across one meadow and the cliff's edge to the sea. There in the scoop of the bay between the horns of the headlands, passed three sails.

All at once the place took me, shook me, as no other has ever done. Not only that it was beautiful: the rare realization of perfection in a concrete, living thing; but as if it were mine and I had helped to make it. Nature had not done it alone; Nature had not raised the castle on the height, nor planted the poplar trees just where they were wanted, nor made the low stone walls and the white sails. She and man had wrought together for this thing; it had taken long in the making, centuries had gone to it; but on that day it was perfect. A. thought some memory in my blood had been surprised into half-consciousness by this sudden confrontation with the scene. Yet I scarcely think that it was personal. I looked into the face of Nature, seeing there some moving sense of human history that was like an answer,

like a recognition. Perhaps it was just that the heart was all one flower, murmurous with contentment, like a bee making honey.

While we sat there no one else came, but I don't know whether we owe that good fortune to the indifference of the other guests, or to a touch of intuition in the little waitress, that made her divine, that we were two who would like coffee in the garden—alone.

VIII.

THE breakfast of Jimmy the boot-boy having become more and more Gargantuan in character recently accounted for the disappearance of a half-pound of butter, whereat I was forced to remonstrate with Marian.

"It's the very best butter," I said, with an echo of the March Hare, "and I can't afford for half-a-pound to go at one sitting."

"It's like this," Marian explained, "His mother's told him she won't keep him any longer, and he has to earn more money; so he don't get nothing but what he gets here, and he's like a wolf, ma'am."

I had a talk with Mrs. Mower at the first opportunity across her garden fence.

"I quite agree with you," I said, "Jimmy *is* too old to be cleaning a few boots and laying a few fires as his day's work. The master will put an advertisement for him in the paper."

The advertisement bore no fruits for a

time or two : there were other boys in that "Wants" column. And then there came an answer, an answer full of promise ; Mrs. Mower herself brought it down about noon, breathless and quite excited. Jimmy read it first, with an air of importance ; it was passed to the master, then to me.

By collaboration on our part, spit and polish and painful effort on Jimmy's, and, after the spoiling of much paper, and the rejection of various rough drafts and blotted sheets, a fair copy was finally achieved. It's true the lines marched rather brokenly, like ranks of raw recruits under fire, the bayonet points of t's and l's straggled at undisciplined angles, the dots and periods had an explosive look of bursting shells, and there were a few smudges where some word, too fiercely assaulted with the quill, had spattered its inky gore—the stains of Jimmy's battle—but all these bore witness to the genuineness of the epistle, and the master pronounced that it would do.

Not in vain had we laboured. Jimmy was accepted, at a wage of five shillings a week, "to begin with," and, of course, his entire "keep," to perform the duties of handy boy about the place ; harnessing Farmer Harris's horse, and driving the cart to market with

vegetables, or to the "milk-walk" with milk; digging in the garden in his spare moments, and doing sundry odd jobs.

I found a small trunk in the box-room that I could dispense with; the master made contributions from his wardrobe, but kept a wary eye upon certain socks and ties, of which I have always disapproved, and upon certain coats, "spotted like the pard," that might raise scruples in Dr. Johnson himself, but are endeared to A. by the literary polish on their elbows, having, so to speak, rubbed elbows with the Muse.

Jimmy has been gone over a week now, so, as we passed through the village this afternoon, we stopped to make enquiry about young Odysseus.

"How is Jimmy? Does he like his new place?" we asked.

"I can't say, ma'am, not yet."

"Hasn't he written to you?" we both said in chorus, and I added, "The little wretch!"

"There's a postcard come a day or two after he got there, and a letter yesterday, but I was waiting for my daughter Mabel, that's in service; her evenin' out's to-morrow."

"Oh!" said A., "you haven't read them yet? I see."

"Shall I go fetch them, sir?"

“Do, and I’ll read them to you.”

“Thank you, sir! I was never book-learned. In my day ’twarn’t like ’tis now, with everybody sent to school.”

She went to get the letter and card.

“For goodness’ sake, why didn’t she get somebody to read them to her?” I asked.

“Because, don’t you see, she didn’t know what was in the letter; there might be something she didn’t want her neighbours to know. She doesn’t care to have them all discussing her affairs. These people have their proper pride.”

Jimmy wrote:

“Dear Mother,—I wrote a postcard to tell you I got here safe. The train is just like a lot of little rooms. When I got here Mr. Harris met me, and took me and my box home with him in his cart.

I like this place alright. Airships are flying round here thick as bees.”

Then followed a detailed description of Jimmy’s duties; at what hour he rose and fed and cleaned the horse, at what hour he breakfasted, indeed, the hour for each meal was registered, as well as the bill of fare; you could see Jimmy swelling, not only with the contents of four substantial meals a day,

but with a gratified ambition as well. This was solidarity; this was respectability. Jimmy thought that he would stay. He repeated reassuringly that he "liked the place."

Mrs. Mower was pleased, and, in her inarticulate way, grateful for our share in Jim's start in life. We had given him the push that overcame the *vis inertiae* and set him going; we had supplied the impetus; we had chipped his shell, as you chip a pea before planting, to enable it to break through and sprout. How many human seeds are there, quick at the heart, and capable of growth, and yet not strong enough to pierce that shell of circumstance that binds them?

Mrs. Mower's gratitude took other shape than words. She turned to me: "I was thinking, ma'am, maybe you'd like the tortoise? I can't do by him as I ought, havin' only that bit of garden in the front. I have to keep him tied by the leg, and that's terrible hard on him, poor dear! Only last Saturday he come near to bein' run over by the butcher's cart—as near as anything. He'd got loose and crawled into the middle of the street. I have to be away so much charrin', o' course."

In response to an invitation to view the

tortoise, we followed our hostess to the wash-shed, from the darkest, dirtiest, soapiest, smelliest corner of which the creature was unearthed.

Its mistress stood cherishing it under her chin, stroking its head, cooing encouragement to it. She referred to it as him, but I am unable to associate any but the neuter gender with a tortoise; it seems as sexless as a rock, and more so, for I have seen soft moss-breasted rocks that looked as if they might be mothers of quite a nice little family of pebbles.

“He’d be happy, I think, on that lawn of yours, ma’am, and with the brook, too. Very good things they be to have in gardens, they say; they eats the slugs. And nice quiet pets—I’ve never known him make a sound, though I’ve heard it read out from Scripture ’bout the voice of the turtle bein’ heard in the land. A different kind, I s’pose, from these here tortoises of ours, they have in them foreign parts.”

In answer to my exegesis: “A dove is it, they mean, ma’am, like our wood-pigeon? Well now, who’d a thought it? I’ve often wondered. They do make a nice, soothin’ sound. Scripture ain’t easy to understand unless you have it explained to you by them that knows.”

I accepted the tortoise with all the enthusiasm at my command, and transferred it from Mrs. Mower's bosom to my more lukewarm embrace ; the creature took an extra plait or two in its neck, so that only its head showed under the jutting eave of shell. It was the dingiest tortoise I have ever seen, and it had only one eye. As if she knew the analogy that was in my mind, Mrs. Mower said :

"He's only got one heye, just like Jimmy. If Jimmy had a' had his other heye, he'd a been a soldier same as his brothers."

"You have two boys in the Army?" A. asked.

"One at Aldershot and one in India, sir."

We were shown a tea-set that the one in India sent home to her last Christmas.

"You'll keep it to use on high-days and holidays?" I said.

"Use it?" She seemed quite startled by the suggestion. "I never could feel cosy havin' my tea out of that 'eathen china. There may be some finds beauty in such things, and I'm pleased Tom thought of me and all—but just look at this here, ma'am, will you now?"

She produced a small image of Ganesh the elephant-headed, picked up somewhere in the bazars, and probably returning after its

wanderings to the land of its nativity, for it looked to have been manufactured in Birmingham.

"Tom says they worship this thing for a god. It don't seem right exactly, do it, havin' 'em in a Christian house—graving himages and 'eathen hidols?"

Outside the cottage gate we met the Vicaressa, and I spoke of Mrs. Mower's qualms of conscience in respect to the "grav-ing himages."

"She has a son in India. She lives only two miles from a station, yet she has never been in a railway-carriage in her life. Doesn't it seem strange?" I said.

"You often see that," the Vicaressa answered. "There's old Mrs. Snoad, who lives at Little Hawkham-in-the-Hills. Her grandchildren have gone out to the ends of the earth: a grandson in Canada, another in South Africa; yet when she goes to visit her daughter in Harcourt, she changes from carrier's cart to carrier's cart, though she could get there in an hour. When I asked her why she didn't take the train, what do you suppose she said? She didn't hold with railways!"

If I lived in a place like Little Hawkham-in-the-Hills—a grey village that is itself like

some dear old grandmother dozing in her chair, dreaming the dreams of her youth, I shouldn't hold with railways either ; though even there, is no escape from the burr of motors, the hooting of their horns, and once, at least, an aeroplane, heading to cross the narrow straits, has swept the shadow of a wing across its sleep.

Meanwhile, the one eye of the tortoise—averse, as his mistress, to change—showed something like a glint of alarm as I bore him home with me, now craning out his neck in enquiry, now at the slightest overture becoming a sealed book between his horny covers: “type,” as I said to A., “type of your Englishman who travels, but always in his shell.”

IX.

JIMMY is not the only person of my acquaintance on whom the necessity for economic independence has suddenly been impressed. This morning I had a letter from Yolande. "I want to start out for myself. I want to earn my own living. Can't you suggest something?" she writes. "My stepmother is very nice and says she wishes me to stay with them, and, of course, I know father wants me. But things can't be the same; I'm not needed any longer to keep house, and she would feel it more her house if I were to go away. The trouble is I wasn't brought up to make my own living, and there's nothing I'm specially fitted to do. I'm not literary and I'm not artistic, but I want to do something pretty. I'm very clever with my needle. I have read of women who started a shop—designing original blouses, or children's clothes, or hats or something of the kind, and were very successful. I have a small capital

of my own, the money mother left me. I think I'll go to New York.

"I won't be a trained nurse; it's not pretty and it's not cheerful, and I haven't the self-control; I couldn't stand the sight of pain. I should cry over my patients and make the doctors angry. You said something once about gardening being a healthy profession for women. I should love to do that, I should love to live out of doors, to live with flowers, if I could have a boy to mow the lawns and do the digging and the heavy work. I'd be expected to do those things, wouldn't I? And I'm afraid my hands and feet aren't quite, quite——"

I should think they weren't, indeed! She wears a $5\frac{1}{2}$ glove and a $2\frac{1}{2}$ shoe, or is it a 2? I'd as soon think of a moth or a humming-bird for a gardener. She could flit about the flowers and that's all. But why not, why not a florist's shop? Not the usual commercial florist's shop, is what I see, but something different, and Yolande is the person for it. She has a sure instinct for beauty, an original taste, a personality so sympathetic that it makes a grace, a very virtue of indiscretion.

On one plate-glass window "Sympathetic Florist"; on the other "Mademoiselle

Yolande Olivier—Composer of Floral Symphonies and Poems.”

It would pique curiosity; most women and not a few men would be arrested by that sign, the meaning of which would reveal itself somewhat in this wise:

A gentleman enters and says: “I want a bouquet made up.”

“What would you prefer?”

He looks at some cut roses in a stand.

“Perhaps Monsieur will pardon if I ask whether it is for a special occasion—to match a gown?”

“For a dance. I don’t know the colour of the gown.”

“A bouquet to be carried? American Beauty roses? What does Monsieur say to these orchids? There is nothing more rich, but they are not for the *jeune fille*, of course.”

“I wish a bouquet for my daughter.”

“For a young girl? I have the very thing.”

And she produces a round bouquet, rather tightly made, of pink moss-rosebuds, forget-me-nots and lilies of the valley; to the end of each of the long soft streamers of pale blue satin ribbon is attached a prim little nosegay of the same flowers.

“How quaint and innocent and charming it is, but only suitable for a young girl.”

The gentleman's eyes soften with a peculiar pleasure as if the bouquet conjures up some quality of her for whom it is intended.

"I do not remember the colour of the gown," he repeats, conscious for the first time of the importance of this point. "I think it is white."

"With a pink or blue frock it would go well; with white it would be perfect," he is assured.

The gentleman gives the address. While it is being written down he asks :

"Do you consider such points as—er—age and suitability in selling flowers?"

"If the customer leaves it to us. As in the selection of a hat or gown, it enters. Only, as it is sentiments we have to harmonize, our affair is more subtle—but flowers *are* subtle, spiritual, expressive."

"I see," says the gentleman, though he looks puzzled.

"A widower," Mademoiselle comments to herself, when he has received his change and gone.

The next is a young man who knows exactly what he wants; he orders a dozen long-stemmed, immense crimson roses at two dollars apiece.

"These are fresh, aren't they? They're all right?"

"Oh, quite. They are so glowing, so rich—fit for a beauty that is tall and dark."

The young man pauses in the act of paying for them.

"What do you mean by a beauty that is tall and dark?" he enquires resentfully.

"Only that certain flowers suggest certain types of people, don't they, Monsieur? These roses are brunette."

The young man looks coldly down his nose as though the young woman waiting on him were talking nonsense, impertinent nonsense at that.

"Have you any blonde roses?" he asks sarcastically.

"Oh, yes; yellow roses. But yellow roses never seem so young. I think daffodils are the most blonde flowers we have: they are so full of spring and sunshine. A great bunch of daffodils and yellow orchids, with some paler lemon-coloured sprays of freezia among the ferns, all tied with a ribbon of gold tissue."

"Daffodils! Aren't they a very common flower? Much cheaper than roses?"

Mademoiselle represses a desire to smile.

"On the contrary, the rarer, newer sorts cost anything, as much as ten dollars a bulb."

"Really ! I had no idea."

"It will not be too cheap. Your bunch, made up of this new variety of daffodil, these orchids, ferns, and the gold ribbon, will come to thirty dollars."

The young man looks as if he had been rather too well pleased in this matter of expense.

A lady, coming in, wishes a basket of cut flowers. While she deliberates upon her choice, the hint is breathed to her.

"Perhaps Madame would like them to accord with a room of some particular colour?"

"Yes, of course. Let me see—her bedroom is cream and gold, I think."

"Then may I propose this ivory-coloured basket, tied with yellow satin ribbon, filled with violas, first these pale mauve, then these deepest purple velvet, then the yellow—see how large they are—with a background of graceful little yellow irises and ferns?"

"I want another basket for an old rose-room. What have you for that, please?"

"Old-rose is more difficult, but these purple pink dwarf Polyantha roses, with a background of purple pink heather, would be pretty."

"The flowers must all be white," says the customer who follows, "and the wreath must be a small one, quite small."

From that Mademoiselle knows, with a pang in her heart, that a baby is dead. Very gently she answers :

“Instead of the wreath, Monsieur might like a flat design, a little white pillow ?”

At the words a quiver twitches Monsieur’s face, and he stoops to examine a bowl of tulips.

“A little white pillow,” says Mademoiselle softly, “made all of double white violets and single white hyacinths. The snowdrops are past, but I will put some of these fragile white crocuses with pale purple veins. I will make it beautiful.”

The gentleman thanks her, and says he would like that.

One young man is very curious as to the meaning of the sign on the window, so curious that he asks point blank. Mademoiselle shakes her head. “Many have asked me, even reporters ; they must find out for themselves.”

“How can I find out ?” the young man persists.

“You wish to buy some flowers ?” she says, pointedly.

He looks about him, admiring first one thing and then another.

“I don’t know which to choose—they are

all beautiful. I suppose it doesn't make much difference?"

"It makes all the difference. Usually those who send flowers have some sentiment they wish to express, unless they merely wish to send something conventional and expensive, and those who receive the flowers have usually some flower they care for more than the rest—some flower they love. Flowers touch the chords of association and waken dear or painful memories. Or, if you are sending flowers to the sick, you must choose those that have not too strong an odour."

"As it happens, I do wish them for some one who is ill."

"Daffodils," Mademoiselle began, "are cheerful bedside flowers. They are spring."

"My mother," said the young man, opening his heart.

"A mother!" Mademoiselle's tone was wistful. "For a mother who is ill I think you should have these forced white lilacs."

"I begin to see," said the young man, why you are the 'sympathetic florist.'"

"Or the sentimental florist," says Mademoiselle.

What nonsense I am talking! Yolande couldn't serve in a shop, and if she could, it's all fantastic. But I wonder in some far-off

fraternal day if we will not humanize business and make all the trades sympathetic? How interesting they will become. Even as things are, I cannot think of flowers sold as coldly, callously, commercially, as ironmongery or cheese.

The florist's business touches life so closely, the very heart of our affairs. The lover frequents him, he supplies our weddings, our feasts and our funerals. With flowers we strew the exits and the entrances of life, our birthdays and our death days. Flowers belong to all our occasions, great and small. Into every florist's shop thoughts are entering, as bees into a garden, making the flowers fertile with the love that is on their wings, and the most delicate human sentiments, like invisible white butterflies, are hovering in the air.

X.

LAST summer we found one perfect walk, and we decided not to take it too often and blunt its charm, but only when the hour or the season brought some touch of rarer magic: in spring and in autumn, in salutation or valediction; at sunset or moonrise, perhaps; or to hear the nightingale.

It has no prospects and no "views," that walk, but a sort of secret beauty. The long avenue, arched with yew and cypress and forest trees, seems tunnelled into the solid woods, as if it led to the heart of some ancient mystery. Down its vista, bough springs to meet and lap bough, by a trick of perspective, though in reality the one may be yards behind and apart from the other.

The old church, the mouldering tombstones, the weeping willows, the memorial cypresses like shafts of shadow made substance, the swans in the sedges, all belong to the symbolism of a Maeterlinck drama. That

island in the clear, dark middle of the lake might be Böcklin's island of the dead, and the swans the gliding boats in which their souls find ferryage. Here are mixed beauty, death and solitude, to make that quality, remote, romantic, inexplicable, that glammers lines of Keats and certain canvases of the pre-Raphaelites, wherein poet or painter, in his happiest hour, has seized the intangible and given it us to dwell and wonder on, fingering the hem of Nature's more ultimate meaning.

Autumn, I think, must always be the best time for this spot ; for then the bronze mosses on the roof of the church, and of that lonely cottage behind the church, where I never see any signs of habitation, repeat the tones of the drying rushes and sedges at the water's edge ; the willow falls like a fountain running pale gold ; and the wild-fowl circle and cry.

One evening of last month when we were there, ducks and moorhens were swimming in widening arrow-heads of ripple over the smooth water, or, in flying wedges of four or five, traversing the sky, returning from some excursion to the marshes ; or else a pair on the wing repeatedly circled the lake. We sat on the parapet of the stone bridge, listening

to their clangings and squawkings, until opposite us rose a disc of silver, with thin, beaten edges, which, as it climbed, flushed with faint ardours from the sunset hidden behind the woods. Black against that brightening plaque, the flying barbs and the mated pairs crossed and recrossed, as in a print I have seen of Hokusai's—or is it Hiroshige's?—of wild geese flying against the moon. Nothing else: a background of gray vacancy, and wild wings flying against the moon.

That was last month's moon, and now what a change! We have freezing weather, and it's only the end of November. When I looked out to-night and saw the earth doubly white with the whiteness of moonlight and hoar-frost, I thought how ripping it would be to see the lake all set in rime and glittering with icy margins. There's something nocturnal in me that always wants to prowl on splendid nights; something atavistic and pre-civilized that has never had a chance! And now, though still I cannot go alone, it's better to go encumbered with a husband than not to go at all. So I ran upstairs to A.'s study.

He had already changed into a smoking jacket and slippers, drawn up his reading lamp and table in front of the fire, and

lighted his after-dinner pipe. He shivered at my proposal, and squeezed himself deeper in his chair. I had to remind him of how often, before we were married, his letters had been full of the glory of a frosty night when he had walked home late from a neighbour's. Marriage, I suppose, is the beginning of a fireside season that counts the creature comforts.

"It's most unusual to get a night like this in November. We may not have another ; at any rate, not before we go away. I want to see the lake by this——" I drew back the curtains on the gleaming fields outside.

When we had put on thick boots and coats and caps, we set out through a world new and shining from the hands of a celestial silversmith : the meadows twinkling with a myriad, myriad brilliants, the grass snapping like spun-glass under our feet. The frost had sealed the world to itself. Not a wind contended with it, not a breath ; it held the earth as the moon took the sky. The sheep were all black sheep ; dark blots against the white ; dingy as mere comparative earthly goodness might look by the side of heavenly innocence.

We went through Southwood Park, where thousands of starlings roost ; and as we passed

the coppices there was a great, restless stirring of birds. I don't think we startled them. Their disturber was probably some owl questing for food, like a porpoise among shoals of little fishes. We could hear them rise and rush through the woods, with a crackling and rattling and a tinkling of icy twigs together, like the pendants of a crystal chandelier. They would settle with a great noise, and all would be still; and then, presently, they would rise and rush on again. This was repeated a number of times.

As we neared the lake, a solitary wild duck got up, squawking, and flew away to warn his fellows. I have always heard that wild-fowl post a sentinel at night. A thin skin of ice was over all the lake, except near the shore, where the uncovered water was black and deep as an unfathomable thought. The moon lay at the bottom of it, round, yellow, untremulous, solid-looking as a plate; but further out a star swam incessantly, in elongated reflection, with waving tail and fins.

The yews of the churchyard were blacker than ever, and it gave one a little thrill to know that at this hour the moonlight must be slipping one white finger through the slitted window of the lady-chapel, to touch that cold, white woman all alone. She has

a painful, shameful story, and one is hardly sure whether the lady-chapel is a proud device to shut her away from the ancestors that lie in the transept under their bronze and marble baldachins, or was built as the casket that shrines a jewel, by the one person who prized her. I stood on tiptoe trying to see into her cell, but the little west-window was too ivy-grown and high.

The keeper's house was lighted to-night, and the lights slanted out like long golden ladders let down to reach the deep bottom of the lake, to reach that sunken treasure of the moon.

"I miss the ducks," A. said. "That fellow doesn't seem to have waked them up, after all."

"Ducks wouldn't satisfy me to-night. I want to hear a wild goose honking, 'way up in the sky. Though that's a sound for a dark night, when it drops on you out of the invisible overhead. You've never heard it, have you? I have, and I wrote a poem on it:

'Far in the night I hear a lonely horn
Blown at the portals of some castled cloud;
The challenge of an elfin knight forlorn,
That to a world-long wandering is vowed.
The walls of sleep are shattered to their fall,
As Jericho before the enchanted blast,
My heart springs up, allegiant to that call—
Too late!—to find the shadowy leader passed.'

There are four more verses, but I'm not going to quote them."

A. thanked me for my consideration in refraining, and we went on our way.

One of the several reasons that we like this walk is because there is no retracing, no going over the same ground. It has the completeness of the circle, and, after fetching a circuit of three miles, brings us back to the farm.

As we turned into the high road, a rabbit started up and ran across the fields, as silently as if one of the little shadows by the roadside had suddenly picked itself up and flitted away. Three men who had been drinking at "The Golden Rose" gave us "Good-night!" as they passed, after the custom of the countryside; but otherwise, so far as human presence was concerned, we had the night to ourselves.

XI.

Yes, we are going away. We shall go before Christmas, and not come back until the end of February. Christmas puts a premium upon the family, and two persons do not constitute a family; they may be comrades, companions and other things, but they are not a family. No amount of holly and mistletoe in the red dining-room, no crackling big logs, would keep us from feeling that something was wanting to a chimney wide enough for Santa Claus to drive his team down, instead of leaving it standing on the roof; to a mantel-shelf long enough for the Old-Woman-that-lived-in-the-Shoe to hang up the stockings of her entire brood.

I want to go, and yet don't want to. The garden will be asleep, all but the *jasminum nudiflorum*, the winter jasmine, already beginning to bloom, reviving a memory of sunshine round my windows; and little

enough will be happening in the fields. Nature's gray back-drop will be down; her orchestra away or silent; her scenery unstaged.

I could get through the winter quite happily in my indoor garden, to borrow Ruskin's metaphor, though our book-garden is about as limited as our flower-garden. We haven't many hybridized classics, nor compilations of selections by which literary snobs claim acquaintance with authors they don't know, and we haven't many annuals. We get those, the novels of a season, from the circulating library, from which, too, we get a variety of good books, though mostly new ones. I don't care for novels, but I notice that when I say so to people who read novels, they always resent it, as if I were giving myself airs. Why, I don't know, for I should never think there was any intellectual inferiority in a taste for fiction if those who indulge it didn't make this tacit confession. It's merely as if one said, "I prefer salads to sweets."

I've just been reading one of the exceptions to my rule of preference—Masefield's *The Street of To-Day*, which probably had its vogue a year or two ago, for I am always discovering the sensations of past years. It's

a book that sends whiffs of association blowing over you that seem to relate you to all life, as the scent of warm hayfields relates you to all earth; a book that sets swift fancies whirring in your mind, half glimpsed, like moths in the dusk. It is this stimulating power, this power to stir up response, and make the reader know not only the author's mind, but his own mind as well, that is to me the most precious quality a book can have.

Towards the majority of books one's attitude is receptive; they give, you hold your mind expectant of contribution, like the beggar's cap for coin; with others you adopt the attitude of customer to merchant and inspect their wares, appraise, perhaps reject. But with a few you enter into converse; you answer back; their theme so swells in you that you begin to embroider variations, and presently are playing a duet.

I read more science and philosophy than A., though there is no subject that does not provoke his curiosity and interest, but I am withheld from pluming myself by his grasp of the daily paper, his masculine, far-reaching mastery of that complex and baffling organ. You can never begin at the beginning of a newspaper; it is full of allusions to things

that happened yesterday, or a month ago, or last year. Miss a day or two and I'm lost, and if I try to pick up the thread of current debate, parliamentary and otherwise, I find myself unwinding the reel of English history for the past two hundred years.

Just now, with Italy in view, I'm freshening my memory of Suetonius' *Lives of the Cæsars*; reading Cellini's *Autobiography* yet another time, and some of Symonds' *Studies of the Renaissance*.

Strange, one doesn't approach Switzerland, where we are going first, down a historical perspective, read and dream about it in advance. It is exhilarating, "as well for the body as the soul." I enjoy it, but I have no sentiment about it. It is too scenic, panoramic, perfect. It seems to have been designed for tourists. No people have a stronger sense of nationality and liberty than the Swiss, and yet their country hardly seems to belong to them in the same personal, homely way that other countries belong to their populations.

Modern Switzerland is like a great park for the world to take holidays in. And the Swiss themselves, so practical, methodical, well-regulated—a nation of watchmakers—a small working-model of a Republic run by

clock-work. A country of glaciers and no volcanoes, with few great convulsions and upheavals in its history: its patriotism pure, but kept in cold storage; its liberty a tidy goddess, not blood-stained, scarred and be-draggled as she is in other lands.

No wonder Switzerland has drawn a line at Italy with a past; has built up a wall between herself and Italy, the tragic, the blood-sodden, the sin-stained, the immemorially splendid. And yet dark shadows lie in those Swiss valleys, insanity and cretinism and crime.

I asked my friend, the Farmer, if he wasn't going to take his wife to Switzerland for a holiday this winter: he has bought his son a motor-car and his daughter a new hunter. He met the suggestion with a snort.

"Switzerland!" quoth he. "Why, winter before last I saw all the ice and snow I ever want to see out here on these very hills."

I murmured something about air.

"There's as good air on these downs as there is anywhere in the world; that's what I believe," he announced with conviction. "I never could bear foreigners," he pursued. "London's got too foreign to suit my taste. I was there a week or two ago, and I went

into a restaurant. There wasn't a dish on the list I knew the name of, and a waiter come up and gabbled some sort of gibberish. I wasn't going to bother with him, so I sent for the proprietor. 'Haven't you got anybody that can talk English?' I says. 'Oh, wee, Monseer, zay all spik Eengleesh,' and he beckoned to another fellow, and he come up and jabbered different from the other one. 'Well, if that's the kind of English you speak it won't do for me,' I said and I picked up my hat and stick, and left."

Then he set out to look for solid British fare and waiters who could speak the language, but all the places had foreign names on their doors, Italian, German even, or "fancy and French."

I told him about "The Cheshire Cheese." "There you would have got steak and kidney pudding or a pie made of larks—'And when the pie was opened the birds began to sing.'" I didn't say that I shouldn't be at all surprised to hear them raise an accusing pipe against their murderers, like the children incorporated in the pasty set out before St. Anthony of Padua, for while the Farmer finds a comforting familiarity in the suggestion of "The Cheshire Cheese" and

steak and kidney pudding, I doubt whether he has ever heard of St. Anthony of Padua. Lark pie has for him a more than physical relish ; every lark is his despoiler, and I shuddered as he told me how he never finds a lark's nest in the grass but he sets his foot in it, suiting to the word a scrunching action of his great boot. Material gains, how they tread and have always trodden the world's music underfoot !

XII.

I LIKE the curate—not our curate, but the curate at Nearsham who helped us out of our dilemma about the maid by proposing that she should join his girls' club. We have been friends since he said to me, quite seriously, one day: "I know you are a heretic, but I like you," and I answered: "I know you're a curate, but I like you."

When he was canvassing for donations to his Christmas bazaar, he came to me as confidently as if I were a parishioner. I disapprove the cause—this bazaar is for the church schools—but, as I say, I like the curate.

"I'll give you six jars of quince jam," I promised, and as he didn't seem to realize the magnanimity of this, "Quince jam," I repeated: "Maybe you don't know that it's two or three times as much trouble to make as any other kind, but A. won't eat any other. . . Before one marries, one should

find out a man's taste in jams, among other things; raspberry or strawberry are simple enough—there's no reason to break the engagement—but quince——” Whereupon the curate, accustomed, I suppose, to interrogate himself in the light of other men's weakness, solemnly discovered in himself a new virtue. “I never eat jam,” he said.

To-day was the third day of the bazaar, and, the contribution of the jam not exonerating me, I went, and wandered among the stalls, resisting or succumbing to the solicitations of overzealous young saleswomen, and realizing the special providence of having bazaars at Christmastide, so that you can immediately give away the things you buy that are of no possible use, and which would torment you with their futility if you had to keep them in the house.

The fancy-work stall, for instance, was a monument to the perversion of human—I should say, feminine—time and industry, with its array of fussy trifles in lace, muslin and linen, receptacles for pins, powder, hair-pins and combings, “with ribbons and bibbons on every side”; things that the columns of the woman's page, or the *Ladies Home Guide*, meticulously instruct you how to make. I've often wondered if anybody

really made them, but evidently somebody does. There was the usual covers, d'oyleys, cushions worked with the sweet forget-me-nots that bloom for amateur embroiderers. If the real forget-me-nots resembled the sentimental idiocy of these arrangements of blue and pink silk floss, I would have come home and rooted up the row I made the gardener put in the west border ; but, happily, they don't.

I heard a voice behind me, harried by the necessity for choice, insisting : “ But I *have* to give Ethel something ; I simply *have* to —she always gives me something.” And I would have smiled at this travesty of the spirit of Christmas, but a sudden dive into my inner consciousness, after the manner of the curate, showed me that my own giving wasn't altogether ungoverned by this principle of reciprocity.

The curate, himself, was in “ the clergy stall.” He had just looked in to see how things were going, he told me. The clergy stall was nondescript and miscellaneous ; it contained every manner of article, from books and painted china to needlework and sweets. Two ladies were examining its resources.

“ Ella, you said you couldn't find anything to give a man ; here are a lot of things for

men—collar boxes and tie-cases and shaving-books.”

The curate’s attention, caught by this remark, wandered from what he was saying to me.

Ella dismissed contemptuously the tie-cases and other flim-flim, and turned to a serried row of slippers. “Why, they’re all the same size!” she exclaimed; “how extraordinary!”

The curate’s eyes widened with so instant and guilty an alarm that suspicion flashed into my mind. Were, then, the tributary slippers laid at young clergymen’s feet, a fact, and no myth? But these slippers were obviously intended for a man wearing a number eleven, whereas the curate’s feet are noticeably small and shapely and well-shod. If he has a worldly vanity, it is his boots.

“Here’s one small pair,” the other lady announced, after search; “these would do for George.”

She, whom we had heard addressed as “Ella,” thrust a hand into the felted interior and drew forth a card.

““Dear Mr. Langham,—the thought that you will wear these,” she read. “Why, it’s Alice’s card! I beg your pardon, I thought it was the price ticket.”

Mr. Langham went very red.

"It's a mistake," he stammered, "a mistake, I'm sure. A pair of my own seem to have got mixed with this lot; I'm awfully sorry."

"I suppose young curates *do* have a great many slippers sent them," said the lady, icily, "but *still*——"

She left the sentence hanging in a suspension more effective than any words with which she could have completed it. It implied, heaven knows what—but it implied. It was eloquent of reproach. "What business is it of hers?" I thought.

"My parishioners are very good, but they hardly realize how little time I have to sit about with my feet in slippers."

The curate might have lent this speech dignity, but he made it abject, apologetic.

She went away without buying the slippers for George, and, when she had gone, the curate groaned aloud. I had absorbed myself in looking at a calendar, to spare him embarrassment, but he wanted sympathy.

"It's her sister's card—her sister's—that's what makes it so dreadful," he explained.

"Are they *all* your slippers?" I asked.

"Oh, no, the rest are Hadley's. This pair of mine got in by accident. You see,

Hadley was here not long ago—he's curate at Middleford—and he saw I had a lot of things that had been given me and he had a lot of the same sort—very nice, but we didn't know what to do with them. He was going to have a Christmas bazaar, too, so he proposed that we exchange and sell them off. The distance made it safe; the people who gave them wouldn't ever know, the church would profit and the things might go to somebody who could use 'em. I didn't see the harm; there wouldn't have been any, but for this unfortunate mistake. They'll never forgive me—she'll tell her sister, sure to. And they're both very hard workers in my church—they help me a lot."

I found it difficult to be becomingly serious when I wanted so much to laugh. Inwardly, I was bubbling under my lid of decorum. I thanked heaven A. was not there; he would have shouted with laughter; and just then I caught sight of him—he had promised to come—entangled in the coils of a pretty stall assistant.

"What have they been making you buy?" I asked, as I deposited my parcels in his arms.

"I've just bought six jars of quince jam," he said, triumphantly; "the only sensible thing I could find."

XIII.

WE have been at home nearly two weeks and I have not written a line, not even a salutation, in the book of the house that I closed so abruptly in the business of packing and getting ready to leave.

My immediate task was to get a new servant, for Marian could not return to us ; her mother had a "stroke" soon after Christmas and she is needed at home. The first application for service was from a girl who lives in Kynaston, and, as I have always wanted a village girl, I consulted the Vicaressa, who came to see me as soon as she heard we were back. The Vicaressa, of course, knows the story of everybody in the parish : she knew poor Lucy's, in which there has been one dark chapter.

"I can't tell you more," said the Vicaressa ; "that's all I know : they are rather new people here."

"New people" in an ambiguous phrase.

The Clarridges of Broadhanger are spoken of as "new people," and they have been here twenty years.

"I went there one day to see the mother," the Vicaressa continued, "and I saw a little grandchild playing round the door. I said : 'What's this ?' for I'd never heard of the daughter being married. Old Mrs. Porter said : 'It's been a great sorrow to us, ma'am.' I must say she seems a very decent person."

The Vicaressa is the shepherdess of the Vicar's flock, and it is doubtless incumbent on her to be inquisitorial, to know the goats from the sheep ; certainly there are few things that escape those keen dark eyes of hers. But by me the decorous fiction that the baby belongs to Lucy's stepmother will always be respected.

"I suppose what you tell me would prevent her from getting a place so easily—here ?"

"Naturally ; who wouldn't object ?"

"I don't object," I said.

The Vicaressa widened her eyes. Tennyson's fine lines about

"The sin that practice burns into the blood,
And not the one dark hour that brings remorse,"

with its very pointed allusion to "the holy

king, whose hymns are chanted in the minster," rose in my remembrance. I didn't quote them, but all the same I fear the Vicaressa went away thinking me a person marked by dangerous laxity of view.

"In England every dog is allowed one bite," was how A. put it to the Vicar afterwards in discussing the same subject.

"What did the Vicar say?" I asked, wondering whether he had been left capable of speech at all.

"Oh, he rather agreed with me," said A. easily, who is not the best witness as to the effect his remarks produce.

"Much virtue in '*rather*,'" I replied.

I went to interview Lucy. I even saw the baby, who calls Lucy "Lucy," and Mrs. Porter "Mother." A. was waiting for me outside in the lane.

"Did you engage her?" he asked at once.

"She has been lately in service in a public-house, her character, presumably, not being sufficiently stainless for a private one. A 'pub' would unfit her—get her into vulgar, slipshod ways. I was almost afraid. She wouldn't know any of the niceties of life," I explained. "But she has big, honest, brown eyes, like a dog's—a dog that hasn't

known kindness always, and is uncertain. They have a whipped look."

"Poor devil!" said A. "Poor devil!"

Whereupon we worked out a theory of Lucy's history, between us, that did as much credit to our imaginations as to our hearts, with the result that before we reached the garden gate our sympathies were wrought to the pitch that nothing would do but for me to turn back at once and tell Lucy she was engaged; else would we both have gone to our pillows haunted by a pair of whipped-dog eyes.

One of the things we told each other, to excuse the rash precipitance of this act, was that the question of "the young man" would now be laid.

"I believe," said A., "it's better to have the possibilities of that question in the past than in the future."

With a lurking sense of our unwisdom we were fertile in pretexts, and, finally throwing off subterfuge, owned we were unpractical; but why shouldn't we once in a way be actuated by the larger motives of humanity instead of our petty, personal interests—giving this young woman another chance and keeping her near her child.

Lucy had been with us exactly a week

when she asked if she might have a Thursday instead of Wednesday afternoon out, the reason for this request becoming apparent when by accident we saw her step into a gig, driven by a smart-looking young man, that was waiting at the top of the meadow.

It is a rude shock to our theories of a crushed and penitent spirit, for this young man is a recent acquaintance, in no way responsible for "Dora May," the baby, but turns out to be a "bookie," who follows the races from county to county over this part of the world. Not a very desirable character, I'm afraid.

"The Vicaressa knows her *genre*: it is we who are the incurable romanticists," I admit to A.; "and sometimes that's only another word for simpletons."

Nevertheless, Lucy does very well as a servant, though she wants some training. . . . A house is a terrible creature for eating up time, and, as I watch the daily work, the energy and flesh and blood that's fed to it, it actually seems to me a carnivorous animal, and worse—a cannibal. It eats me up, too, in little nibbles and mouthfuls, for I must often have it and its needs in mind. And the garden will soon be as bad; but the garden does rest during part of the year,

though it wakes and calls so importunately with the spring. It has said its first word already: the snowdrops are up; the primroses have a bud or two tucked away deep in their leaves—those young leaves, all creased and crinkled from tight packing, like a new baby's hands.

And to-day a yellow crocus has flowered—one little golden trumpet in the grass, blowing a *réveillé*. The weeds are growing already; Nature's lower classes are up and stirring, while the garden aristocracy still slumber in their beds. You can't tell the weeds from the flowers, to begin with; they all appear to be born equal, as the American Constitution so confidently and erroneously asserts of men. And over the woods is that look that comes before the beginning of spring—like a reverie; the dream before the awakening; the langour that precedes love. The tree tops are not fledged: they have not unfolded, nor definitely budded yet, but have lost the precision of winter; are suffused with a softness one rather feels than sees; as if their literal mood were kindling to imagination, were overtaken with some film of fancy. From etchings they are become pastels.

“And there's a look about the leafless bowers,
As if they dreamed of flowers.”

The spring flowers, coming into this uncertain and often untimely world, have the power of closing their hearts against it when it becomes too harsh. The celandine and the snowdrop shut up shop, and their tight, pointed flowers, made weatherproof, shed the cold rain like the ferule of a closed umbrella.

I have a friend who divides the people who care for flowers into two classes: those who love them well enough to pick them, and those who love them well enough to refrain. I fear I'm one of the carnally minded and cannot keep my hands off, but must gather them and hold them and smell them. Possession, I take it, is the first instinct of love. I really don't see any excuse for gathering snowdrops, but that is what I did yesterday, because I have a little bowl of green glazed ware, and longed to see it filled with snowdrops and violets. When the primroses come a great handful of them will go into a bowl of golden Benares brass that stands in its tray. I put a wire flower-holder in my green bowl, and covered it with feathery moss in which I sunk the stems of violets and snowdrops—modesty and purity, side by side.

To-day I feel guilty to see how faint the snowdrops look. They did not wake until

nearly noon, and then slowly and languidly those white wings of theirs opened to show their little green-edged petticoats, as if the angel in them should reveal the woman underneath. They were more droop-headed (Shelley's word) than ever. I believe the perfume of the violets had given them headaches, for if the violet is a nun the snowdrop is a saint. They want the clean, cold air of heaven blowing over the floor of the snows, though I am thankful to say there are no snows.

* * * *

Scarcely have I said the word, of course, when circumstances conspire to give me the lie. The heavens were torn into a myriad white scraps, and sent fluttering down, as if their Author were dissatisfied with them; and they have indeed, these last weeks, been dull reading enough. All day it snowed fast and steadily, in great flakes. I went out and prepared a bird-table on that white cloth of Nature's laying, and A. added all manner of inappropriate foreign courses of whatever he could find in the larder. A half-rotten orange was among his contributions, and an investigative and greedy blackbird, who was sampling everything on the menu, seeing this strange, yellow thing upon the ground,

hopped up to it, stuck in his beak, and immediately gave utterance to a squawk that drew my attention, and also drew the attention of a blackbird friend. I would have given much to know the exact shade of sensation which that squawk embodied; evidently orange was to this omnivorous fruitarian a new experience, and fraught with something of a shock. That it was not a pleasant surprise I deduce from the fact that he took only one other mouthful, more fully to confirm the character of his first impression, I suppose. But the second blackbird must find out for herself, for, contrary to scriptural precedent, it was not she who first explored this fruit of knowledge and prevailed upon her feathered lord to follow suit. They spent the next ten minutes in animated discussion and comparison of experience.

The bird-table was as good as a play, and so diverted me that I could scarcely write my letters for watching what went on, especially as I had only to raise my eyes to command a view through my sitting-room windows. The *pièce de résistance* was some fat set for the tits, though a cocoanut was also provided. Advantage was all with the tits for a time, as they were the only birds that could conveniently cling to the string and the stick

and peck at the suspended morsels. The great tits drove away the little blue tits, for which I was sorry, as the little fellows are my favourites—their funny little masks of faces have such a droll expression. Then a robin, either by accident or design—I believe it was intentional—succeeded in pecking the piece of fat to the ground, where he promptly dispossessed the tits, drove off a sparrow, and had things all his own way until the sparrow went and fetched his friends, and then I interfered. The squabbling went on the day long among half a dozen different sorts and sizes of birds.

With the evening and the advent of the moon it ceased to snow. I discovered an imperative need for something forgotten at the grocer's, and, finding me buckling on my snow arctics, A. decided to go with me, grumbling the while and thanking his stars he had not spent the winter in such a climate with a woman of my nocturnal habits.

He wasn't sorry afterward when we came out into that world looking—I think it is Lowell who has preëmpted the comparison, but it is almost inevitable—so like a sculptor's workshop full of ideas blocked in the rough. The hedges were arabesques; the eaves gargoyles; the trees Gothic stonework. The

winds had not lifted a finger to touch that beauty ; not a flake was fallen. In the village street we came upon the Vicar, the only soul in sight, standing in a muse of admiration.

The church, the yew trees, the snows sparkling to the moon were so exactly like the conventional card that A. said he looked to see "Merry Christmas" or "Compliments of the Season" anachronistically scrawled across that glistening foreground. But I rejected the banal comparison ; it was all so much more like a Della Robbia plaque, with that white sculpture relieved against the delicate blue of the sky. For the sky was blue under all the splendour of moonlight—a soft, scabious blue—the moon gazing on the earth, as in a mirror, and seeing the image of her snow-cruled self. Never was such a glorified pilgrimage to buy a pound of butter !

XIV.

THIS is the season at which I begin passionate perusal of whatever gardening books I can lay hands on, and those gardening journals to which we subscribe, thereby acquiring various conflicting sets of information. Gardeners, amateurs, and even professional florists, disagree. How they disagree! And if you read the Letters from Correspondents in the gardening periodicals your perplexity increases. The rose one correspondent recommends as a profuse bloomer another has hardly got to blossom at all. The methods of the growers have a good deal to do with it, most probably, and the different soils and different climates that exist in English counties side by side. One keeps his begonias potted up in earth all winter, repots in spring, and sinks the pots in beds where they are to flower; another treats them as he would dahlias and always plants out in the ground; and so it goes. Somebody tells you

to sow annuals that do not bear transplanting out of doors in March ; and another adviser says the best results follow sowing in April. Mrs. Earle, in her *Pot-Pourri from a Surrey Garden*, is emphatic on the point that mignonette, Love-in-a-Mist, Shirley poppies, larkspur, never thrive so well if sown later than March 15th.

I like her book, but she does love a tag of latinity, and always calls the commonest flower or shrub by its Latin name, to my utter confusion. Even the wild things are so nominated, instead of by those charming folknames of theirs, so rich in reference and association. Snow-on-the-Mountain, Fair-Maids-of-France, Lords-and-Ladies, Shepherd's-purse, Shepherd's-needle, Balm-o'-the-Warrior's-wound—though the last is rather a mouthful—Cuckoo-flower, called otherwise Milkmaids. How significantly the common people have named the common flowers. Time was, before the introduction of the potato and other vegetables, when nearly every herb of the field had its uses, either as vegetable, salad or drug. I cannot think we are happier in our sophisticated labels: the *Mimulus* sounds as if it came out of the Zoo ; *Streptocarpus* either like a disease or an antediluvian fossil ; *Salpiglossis* as if it

were a first cousin to epiglossis and a member of our human anatomy. How sterile this bastard learning compared with the wild-wood flavour of names like Cuckoo-pint, that are half fairy-tale. Sometimes botany is felicitous: Celandine is pretty; Anemone more musical than Wind-flower or Pasque-flower; and Daffodil even more delightful than Lent-lily.

A garden lover whom I knew in America (Mrs. Candace Wheeler, in her *Content in a Garden*) says: "When some clever friend gives me the Latin name of a favourite flower and it immediately drops through and out of my consciousness, I comfort myself by remembering that Charlotte Cushman once said she could only remember two Latin words, and those were *delirium tremens*." I'm not as bad as that, for many an hour in my youth have I dug round Latin roots in sedulous culture and pursued stems that bear flower and fruit in our language, and I am perfectly willing they should serve the ends of surgery, chemistry and biology; but let flowers come to us fragrant with old memories of use and healing; or quaint similitudes and homely likenings; as heralds of the cuckoo and the song of birds (like the American Wake-Robin); or like hyacinth, narcissus, asphodel,

breathing the legends of a classic world. Roses, violets, myrtles, poppies, lilies are unstultified—simple, in spite of their claims of long descent. Even Mrs. Earle protests sometimes against weighing down some little roadside flower with polysyllabic pedantry.

I covet her library of garden books ancient and modern, but no garden book I have ever seen tells me half the things I want to know about a plant. I learn more from leaning over the palings, looking at cottage gardens and asking questions of their owners. For instance, how am I to know from books whether my seedlings are healthy or drawn, whether I keep them too dry or too damp; how shall I know when they bloom whether the flowers are typical in colour, size and form? How is one to know whether a particular sweet-pea comes true? Only by attending flower-shows, I should think.

I wish some of the graduates of the Botanical Gardens' School of Gardening for Women would give courses of lectures on gardening to classes of women in the country or in small towns, with practical illustrations of sowing, pricking off seedlings, layering, budding and disbudding, potting, pruning and general culture. You could learn more in an hour from that sort of demonstration

than by looking at diagrams for a week. The instructor might provide a few specimens of the plants on which she lectured, or, if that were not feasible, good coloured plates.

The most perfect method of illustrating flowers is by means of models in coloured spun glass. The Agassiz Museum, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, contains a superb collection of these. There is only one man, I believe, who makes them to supply museums. From the flowers themselves, and the drawings of botanists, exact reproductions in coloured wax are first made and then constructed in spun glass, that give you the very texture and tint of a petal. It is almost unbelievable, until you see it, what mere threads of stamens, what silken filaments are realized in that medium—acacias and even the wild Fringe-tree of the Louisiana woods—the “spirit tree,” as it is more poetically named, that you surprise like a ghost in the deep heart of the woods, with its falling fountain spray of strand-like flowers. On the tablet that holds each specimen of blossom and foliage are enlarged anthers and pistils and cross-sections of ovaries, so that one may study minutely the intricate microscopic structure.

Mrs. Earle very truly says gardening is the pastime of the middle-aged ; another proof that middle-age is the very pleasantest time of life. Youth has its heart set on the big things which we can so seldom have : it is middle-age that discovers the little things. One of its discoveries is that, except in the face of some immediate personal bereavement, nobody need be unhappy who has a garden. The animal spirits of youth do not turn to vegetables as a recreation. If Adam and Eve had been evicted from their garden when they were middle-aged they would have felt the punishment twice as much ; as it was, I dare say they were not unwilling to travel and see the world. It's only when we have had time to get a little hot and tired with the chase that we like to cool our hearts with green things. I always regard the nettle as a peculiar outrage, because we are so unprepared to meet with spite and malice and reprisals from a plant.

* * * * *

The catkins on the osiers by the brook in the meadow are out. They can afford to venture for they're all wrapped up in coats of silvery-gray fur. From silver they turn to gold, and when they are fully hatched out are covered with a yellow down, like

fluffy little chicks. They are both silver and gold—as the sun breaking through a cloud. They look perfectly charming in a vase of trumpet daffodils.

The primroses are coming into bloom all along the stream. The young florist-gardener was here to see if he could book some orders for plants, and looked contemptuous when I showed them to him. “A primrose by——”—no, I won’t; inevitable as it seems, I shan’t, I won’t; or, if I do, it is but in the spirit of travesty, repeating the impromptu I chanted across to A. from the further bank, the moment young Thingammy was gone :

“A primrose by the river’s brim
A yellow primrose was to *him* ;
It was to him, but oh, to *her*
It was the whole spring’s harbinger.”

If it were brown or black or crimson or some colour not in Nature, called *Primula obconica* or *Primula siensis*, and quoted and priced in the florists’ catalogues, he would respect it. His spirit is as commercial as that of the young cad who looks at some flower of girlhood and wonders how much money it is worth. These flowers that I take from Nature’s hand, springing up where bird’s or winds have sown them, are more

precious to me than the purchased, premeditated flowers of the formal plat, as gifts are more precious than things you buy.

Indoors the sweet-peas are coming up in pots. They are so sturdy about it, pushing up the earth and throwing off the cover with one strong movement. The soil is all broken and dislodged, and there they stand, their naked little bodies clean as ivory. And each is hooked, like a small interrogation point, as if asking—"What am I going to be?" The answer is written on the outside of its pot, and, if it accepts the maxim of Marcus Aurelius to be true and keep its colour, it will be the rosy lilac of Master-piece, the bright carmine of John Ingman, the splendid crimson of Maud Holmes, the wonderful flame-like colour of Thomas Stevenson, and so on, and so on.

I like round seeds. The germ of life should be spherul, orbal. One pictures the Spirit of Life so curved, so bowed, head upon her knees, hair swept forward to her feet, within her rounded cell. The aster seeds are oblong, and for days the seedlings have clinging to their backs the little brown shirts they have pulled over their heads in getting out.

XV.

THIS morning the maid came in to draw back my curtains, and broke into Memnonic salutation. "It's the sun!" she said, announcing a strange natural phenomenon in much the same tone as the little slavey in Barrie's play, with her "Blime me, if it ain't the sun!" When the sun shines in England it is not only an event, it is an emotion.

At least, this is what I am fast getting to feel. For weeks we have only caught glimpses of a white, far-off orb labouring through a sea of cloud, half-swamped, like a ship in distress. Between the gray sky that shut down on us and the wet earth, we were pressed as in the pages of a sodden book, until now, thank God, spring pokes in a cold, pink finger to turn the leaf.

I miss the warmth less than I do the light. The marking of the hours fades from the dial of the day and leaves it blank. There is nothing to distinguish morning from

waning afternoon. "The land where it is always afternoon"—winter's afternoon! In a country possessed of such an uncertainly working Solar Heating and Lighting Plant some substitute apparatus should have been installed. A fine cluster, say, of incandescent plants to be switched on over Albion. We are worse off than the Arctic regions that have to find their way about by fireworks.

The most trying days are not those when rain and wind rage outside and you build up a Promethean defiance to the heavens on the hearth and make yourself cosy for the day: the worst are when a hope is held out by the shifting skies, and you know that under those cold opacities a dome of blue is waiting to be unveiled. You keep going to the window to look, until with the afternoon the clouds thicken past all doubt.

But to-day was perfect—a blazonry of azure and gold and green, like an illumination in an antique missal amid pages of dull text. I dressed hurriedly and ran down into the garden. The winds were still; the blue cloudless and intense; the lark winding his ascendant song to its culmination in the sky; the peach-trees on the coach-house wall faintly blushed with bloom. A row of

daffodils climbing up the knoll reminded me of a children's festival procession—singing children with banners, winding up a hillside, as you see them in Italy ; not an English Sunday school treat.

The summer in which I came to England to live was one of the wettest summers there had been for years ; and while I lay ill and full of morbid fancies, feeling Death fingering me to see if I were ripe for him to pluck, I used to think how horrible it would be, buried in such a sludgy-squdgy soil. Dust to dust is bad enough, but mud to mud seemed more than I could endure. I wanted to be buried in my own country where my earth could feel the sun. Now I know that one must come to England to know the sun,—to know it not as a matter of course, but as a special dispensation. Those who have always been rich cannot realize the value of riches. And I think here, more than anywhere else, the sun strikes beauty from the earth, and an infinity of colour. One can almost apprehend the point of view in that classic anecdote of the Englishman's "None of your damned blue skies!"

Yes, one must come to England to know the sun as a rare phenomenon, or one must have been in prison, as I have. When the

estate was sold and the proceeds invested, principally in railway stocks that ceased paying dividends within a few months after they were bought, and have never yet resumed, there wasn't enough for both mother and me to live on; so I became the assistant literary editor of a large Southern paper. Three years I sat in a grimy back office: three years I lived without the sun. A. has been in prison, too; he also has been an assistant editor. Now we get drunk on sunshine, liberty and leisure. "Time hath made me his numbering clock" once, so now I have the perfected sense of time; I waste it with a conscious luxury. I squander, but I know the worth of every minute, unlike the bored, rich people round us, whose leisure is a kind of mould and mildew—a fungoid resulting from disuse of life.

On days like this I have a festa; I do nothing obligatory and nothing useful—except in the garden—from breakfast until I go to bed. If I had my way they should all be bank holidays and nobody should do anything disagreeable, yet I don't believe, if every perfect day were so observed, that the British public would run any risk of becoming demoralized by idleness.

George Eliot—whom I seldom quote,

sympathizing with Stevenson's jocular comment "a high, but may we say a somewhat dry lady"—though, for once, I find myself in accord—George Eliot writes: "Sunshine is to me the greatest visible good of life, what I call the wealth of life, after love and trust." Short as it is, the paragraph has her inseparable flavour of sentimentousness. She writes ever with a slight nasal twang shared by the New England school of moralists and derived primarily from the pulpit.

Herodotus has a touching story of an Egyptian princess dying in her young maidenhood, who asked of the Pharaoh her father that once a year when the spring came round her body might be lifted from the dark temple of sepulture and carried into the sun. Year after year, century after century, when the rice fields were green beside the Nile, the little princess with the mummied breast and sightless eyes was borne by a procession of youths and maidens and chaunting priests out into the sunshine that, royal as she was, had been her great relinquishment.

"How the March sun feels like May!"

Spring in the lap of winter—the enchantment of Merlin. The old wizard, with his

charms for putting the earth to sleep, and Vivien on his knee, green-clad, cold of heart, half-clothed with the grey fleeces of his beard, wiling his wisdom from him that she may turn the charm against himself and fix him fast in his own slumber-spell.

“Her robe in colour like the satin-shining palms,

On sallows in the windy gleams of March.”

Of March ! I told you so : the minx is March ! Another sun-myth ! I remember my youthful animosity to Max Müller for having turned the best loved of the Hans Andersen stories into solar mythology. Arthurian legend has shared the same fate. Arthur, the sun of chivalry, must be taken literally, the twelve knights become the twelve months, the Table Round the Houses of the Zodiac.

It all goes back to the same thing . . . and I suppose we are engaged in giving the Icarus legend a fresh start. Flocks of Icaruses rise now ; scarcely a month but one is hurled headlong from the sky ; and because, instead of lying softly among his broken plumes, he lies upon a heap of twisted steel and canvas, we seem to lose sight of the beauty and poetry of that old Daedalian impulse.

XVI.

DUTY is an indoor creature. I can't conceive of her living in the open, though doubtless she manifests herself to gardeners and farm-hands. Of course there are many *musts* in the garden, things that have to be done right now ; but when Duty approaches me with a hoe or a trowel, instead of a besom in her hand, I find her only Pleasure in another guise.

Just when we need him most, Old Johnny is laid up, and the reason is sad to tell. His wife died, and he got drunk shortly afterwards, and, contrary to the received opinion about the providence that looks after drunken men, fell and hurt himself. His old joints are too stiff to relax sufficiently, even under the influence of liquor. I wish I could say that it was his grief drove him to drink, but the fact is that during a lifetime of hard saving, his wife had scraped together thirty pounds or more, and the magnificence of this

legacy tempted Burchell to a first extravagance. All his life, he abjectly explained to A., who was sitting at his bedside, he had heard of whiskey, but he "hadn't never tasted of it, never naught but beer"; but being thus possessed of funds, he made up his mind to have the experience of strong drink before he died. For a head accustomed only to beer, it was too potent, alas, and the poor old man succumbed.

The spirit of the lapse appeals to me; it isn't every septuagenarian who would be so keen to prove a new experience. If the experience be sordid, it was one of the few that lay within the scope of Old Johnny and his thirty pounds. Whatever the stake, risk your counters boldly; and he had the courage for another throw with life, life getting, it is true, rather the better of it; and the weeds, as a consequence, the better of our garden.

It is against the indoor cleaning that I rebel. The vernal impulse in housemaids, through hieratic habit and inheritance that has acquired the force of instinct, manifests itself in a desire to do Spring Cleaning on a large scale.

"But why?" I protest. "I don't see that the house is dirty. We have no carpets to

come up ; we have rugs. Why should it be cleaned ?”

Everybody does spring cleaning, Lucy maintains. It's another of the things that are always done.

But I refuse to have the most divine days of the year dedicated to dirt. I know a charming old lady in America who invited a friend to spend several days with her in the country, and the friend wrote excusing herself regretfully by saying she was having spring cleaning done and couldn't come. Whereupon the old lady wired : “Dirt will keep. Violets won't.”

There must be some sound utility underlying the practice or it would not be so spread over the globe. In Mayfair house-keepers are taking the hollandes off the furniture, hanging curtains, and generally preparing for the return of the master and mistress. But when you've only one house, it should be kept perfect the year round. Spring cleaning seems to me a low class institution, like the Saturday night tub.

The Pilgrim Fathers carried it with them to America—certainly not importing it from Mayfair—and it is rampant in New England, where it means shaking off the grime and ash of winter. It has the roots of its origin, no

doubt, in some pagan festival; but modern life is all utilitarian and has dropped out the picturesque features. We no longer bind the lintels with garlands, crown the housemaids with flowers, and lay the ash upon the hearth with wine.

If we could have a spring cleaning of the House of the Body, sweeping the cobwebs and rubbish out of our minds—though we should still want to keep a few old, useless, sacred memories—making all fresh and sweet and new within, letting sunshine into dark corners—*that* would be worth while! To some extent it is what spring does. I always feel as if windows had opened from within me on all that is without.

It lasts such a little while, this marriage feast. Maturity, Decay and Death—or what looks like death and is but sleep—each have their season to hold the world; this belongs to Love. The meaning is so obvious, that like all axioms it is forgotten except by poets, and painters like Burne Jones, who drew Love leading Beauty by the hand, a cloud of deliriously singing birds about her head. I have it hung over my desk, though of course only in a photogravure. We forget what is the word flung out by every bird and flowering branch, and hummed by every bee that goes

publishing the banns of blossom with blossom, and murmuring their marriage lines. We see only the lovely body of the spring and forget what is her soul.

They have had a spring cleaning in the graveyard, tidied the tombstones, and turned the poor little ghosts out while their beds were made. We saw the signs yesterday when we went our walk. They have cut down the willows and the sedges, trimmed and swept, clipped and cleaned. While I was fuming, the persons passed by who are responsible for it all: the agent of Southwood Park and his wife.

"She did it, she did it!" I said to A. "Don't you hate her very back? A tall, stringy, striding, straight-lined woman in a shapeless tweed suit, like a parallelogram on feet, and an arid, sandy, reddish face like a clay-bank."

"You've never spoken to her in your life," said A., who is always amused by my bursts of futile indignation, and who says that, figuratively speaking, I am always dancing about shaking my fist in the face of the sky.

* * * * *

I stayed out long after dusk planting prim-roses—dozens and dozens of them, as thick

as I can pack them along the bank. It is a fascinating game; they transplant so easily, and if you take sufficient earth up with their roots they never know they have been moved, or at least they make no sign of objection. I have never been able to go into any other garden than Nature's and help myself to all I wanted of anything. And all the while I was digging and grubbing, a thrush was pouring himself out overhead, until it was hard to say whether the flickers of glory floating on the water were moonshine or the golden notes that he had dropped there. It is strange how luminous primroses seem to grow in the twilight. I always go out to look at them in the evening; their beauty, too delicate for day, gilds the dusk, and they become a lamp unto my pathway, a light unto my feet.

The plum trees shed their blossoms in a hurry this year; I think because of an icy wind that blew on them. I'm always glad when I have seen the last of the lamb-like hindquarters of March, but April has brought some cutting blasts. The north wind, like Apollonius at the marriage feast of Lamia, breathed his cold logic on the bridal loveliness and withered it. But the cherry orchards, unhurt, are whitening about us.

It's good to know that the succession is provided for; after peach and plum trees have flowered come the pear tree and the cherry, and apple blossom—loveliest of all—comes next, with lilacs, guelder rose, hawthorn to follow; and last, the dewy eglantine, “mid-May's eldest child.” At home, in Louisiana, spring empties her whole lapful at once. We have hyacinths, pansies, roses, jasmine, lilies, all together. And in the woods the yellow jasmine, azaleas, dogwood—not like the English dogwood, ours are large trees with blossoms two or three inches across, the entire tree being one snowy mass—and the green-gold of sarracenia, growing by thousands in the pine barrens, which are commonly and rather ridiculously called buttercups by the ignorant, for anything less resembling a buttercup I cannot imagine. There is no other flower to my knowledge like it, and the only thing to which I can compare it, with its recurved flower and pendant petals, is the canopy one sees held over the head of Semiramis or some Eastern queen in pictures.

Even with all the wealth of bloom around me—for the English are far more a nation of gardeners than of shopkeepers—I sometimes long for the scent of sweet-olive; or of

the cool night air blowing over the bay trees ; or the hot, aromatic, noonday smell that magnolias pour out of their great ivory chalices. I suppose to each of us there are no flowers like the flowers of home. Keats told Severn in Italy that he lay thinking of the forms of little English flowers.

I have been watching over two nestfuls of thrushes, and it is a relief that they have got their clothes on ; for they were hideous, raw-looking little lumps. Now it will require a much harder-hearted boy to kill them, for it must be easier to kill ugly things, I think. Nothing could ever induce me to roll my hair on crimping-pins at night ; I've always felt that if I were a burglar, and a woman sat up in bed bristling with curl-papers, I could slay her without compunction. So I've an idea that the young thrushes are safer. There's a family of little rabbits living almost next door to the thrushes in the hedge, and they haven't yet learned what fear is ; they let me get quite close to them.

The world is full of young things. The sweet, baby cries of the lambs are a delight. A. himself, who demands a household shod with silence and a universe padded with cotton-wool when he is writing a story, and who sometimes opens his study window and

leans out to remonstrate with the sheep, does not mind them. While their mothers browse, they get together in bands and run races and play games, their ears and tails flapping with every bound. Their favourite game is follow-my-leader. A heap of material for shelters, in case they were needed, was left piled in the meadow, and they run up on that and jump off, evidently trying to see who can leap highest and jump furthest; and round and round they go, each taking his turn, keeping it up by the hour.

There are enough sheep in English meadows, as a clever American woman once amused us by saying, to supply every old woman in the land with a red flannel petticoat and a mutton chop for her breakfast. The flannel petticoat is a necessity, but I'm afraid the mutton chop is only an occasional luxury for a great number of old women. It's what I fall back upon for luncheon when the weekly cycle of variety has been run and the butcher boy's cuckoo cry "Anythink in beef and mutton?" falls without inspiration on my ear. "The staple of every bad inn in England," Tennyson said of mutton cutlets; and who can forget or forgive the manner of his saying it?—how he came down to breakfast, lifted a dish cover,

sniffed at the contents and clapped on the lid again with that remark to his mortified young hostess. The anecdote, told by Max Müller in his *Memoirs*, for a long time marred my pleasure in the Tennysonian muse.

XVII.

I HAVE taken the little sitting-room downstairs for my own, where I shall have my desk and sofa, my photographs and belongings. I never could make a large room personal. A small room concentrates one : the cells of the religious orders are always tiny. The walls not only bring you face to face with yourself and force your own thoughts on you, but they bring near the pictures you care for and the faces of those you talk with. A room as small as this, twelve by twelve-and-a-half feet, means intimacy and excludes "company" ; you cannot get more than four persons in it comfortably, and four sets the limit to general talk—go beyond that and some of the number must become audience, or rather auditors. I like three-cornered talk still better ; the odds of two to one put you on your mettle, or if it is you who are reinforced, make you certain of being in the right.

Then, to return to the question of small rooms, there are the obvious advantages of warmth and snugness and freedom from draught—this whole room is a fireside. The walls are a soft, greenish grey, or greyish green, the colour of young leaves, and the plain-cloth on the floor a darker mossier green, like a continuation of the grass plat that comes right up to the long French window—the only modern window in the house. So that my little room, like a bird's nest, seems to take its colouring from its surroundings, and there is no abrupt transition between out-doors and in. I open the French window and step upon the lawn, into a sunny corner enclosed on three sides, by the house, the brick wall shutting off the kitchen door-yard, and the hedge. The box-edged border that runs round this space is packed as full as it will hold with wallflowers. Oh, those wallflowers! Ranging from palest sulphur through blazing yellows and fiery orange into tawny browns; velvety crimsons that deepen, deepen into undreamed-of dusky richness. Then there are the freaked ones that mix red and gold in the same flower, and the mauve and magenta shades. When the dew, warming with the sun, has drawn the scent from them, the air

is drenched with a very ecstasy of odour. The penetrating sweetness of it makes me quite weak, and to go into that corner is to have a debauch of two senses. You can analyse the effects of sound, you can describe the effects of colour, and to a certain extent their terms are mutual and interchangeable ; but odour cannot be described except in its own terms, for smell is the most subjective of the senses. To those who have it keenly, I should say it is the sharpest ravishment. The other senses have their explicit associations ; they are more intellectual. But this sense of smell : obscure, basic, organic, seems at times like a flood-gate ; we feel the pressure of vast reservoirs of vital experience behind it. It is now the least useful, but once it was one of the three warders of the house of life, and with the eyes and ears did sentry duty. It does so still, in a more limited way, but lets a good deal that is noxious pass its guard. We have no smell-consciousness of ourselves, yet each of us walks wrapped in his peculiar odour, the smell-emanation of his personality, that only animals recognize. The comparative strength of this differs greatly, I should think, in individuals.

What a wonderful line that of Shakespeare's :

“And smells so heavenly sweet,
That the sense aches at thee.”

It describes smell in the only way it can be described, as a psychological effect. My sense aches at the wallflowers, and as for the scent of lilacs before rain—it is a pleasure almost insupportably sweet.

The only perfumes I can endure are the natural perfumes of flowers and of dried herbs. As a friend of mine says, my nose would be worth a hundred pounds to a pointer pup. Though A. has such a nice nose to look at, its sensitiveness is nothing like so keen as mine, so it's just as well that I have the garden door and the corner with the wallflowers and he has the room with the view. When it comes to eyes, we are both as far-sighted as hawks.

I a little begrudge him—I can't help it—the wooded hills of Southwood that he looks out on, with the nearer plantation of some sort of silver aspen that is always being seized with sudden pallors and palpitations. Two or three acres it is, that young plantation, and changeful as a cloud, when it is in leaf; sometimes in the wind it flashes white as the under side of a bird, sometimes it darkens like a pool. “On Wenlock hill the wood's in trouble”—it must have been a

poplar wood, so emotional, so easily agitated.

And then he has the little hillside—that nearest swell of upland that shuts off the view of open country, so that not a house-roof, oast-tower, or sign of habitation that way pricks up between us and the distant downs and hills. It's such a quiet bit, that hill-slope: far from the high road, with not even a footpath to cross it, bare seemingly of all but the husbandman's labour; and yet we find it full of life and happenings. It's like a backdrop against which we watch Nature play out her great, petty drama. The processions of the seasons march across it with their quaint heralds and humble followers.

Last Autumn it was quartered like a shield with golden wheat and silver oats, until the glory of the fields went whirring down before the reaping machine. Afterward, it was the bivouac of the wheat, encamped upon it with a hundred tents. And when the grain was garnered, came the partridges gleaning after the gleaners, like Ruth in the fields of Boaz; though I'm afraid they aren't always considerative enough of the farmer to wait for this aftermath. Then one morning a little phalanx of beaters moved over the

crest, waving their flags, each with a sash of scarlet across his breast, driving the birds down upon the death waiting in that line of muzzles hidden behind the hedge.

A. having it always under his eyes as he sits at his desk, used to call me when the guns were at work, because I like to see them miss; and I was not infrequently gratified. I'm a rather exacting critic of marksmanship, as my standard is somewhat unfairly founded on the performance of an old friend and playfellow of mine: Southern men are born to the use of saddle and gun. Many's the time I've seen him, when he was scarcely more than a boy, standing in his stirrups, the reins loose on the pony's neck, galloping over the short-grassed Louisiana prairies, bringing down the rapid snipe on the wing. And they were wild birds, they had their chance: a chance that was half a certainty with any other shot than Ned.

Green and gold were gone from the glebe when we saw the ploughman passing to and fro, he and his horse silhouetted in the swift-falling afternoon of short November days. The sower followed, invested prophetically with the world's hope of spring. Those two figures, sower and ploughman, clothed

in their ruggedness, with a cosmic poetry to which Millet, perhaps, first opened our eyes.

Afterward, there was a long blank when only the rains and the bleak north winds seemed to possess it, broken sometimes by the lively galloping of hounds and harriers to the blasts of the horn on frosty winter mornings. I liked the sight and the sound of them and used to watch them through A.'s glasses; but secretly I hoped the quarry would get away—get away and live to gambol in the dizzy, daft, eccentric circlings, in which the March hare expresses himself. All this past month one rioted there, mad with joy. I looked to see him wind up by standing on his head and flinging his heels in the air, as a fitting peroration to the last frenzied round, but he never did, and would dash off as he came, no doubt suddenly remembering he was overdue at the tea-party of the Dormouse and the Hatter.

It was in March, too, that I first noticed a strange figure patrolling the borders of the fields with a superannuated gun across his shoulders. Back and forth he tramped, guarding the sleeping seed—a picket of the army of spring—that rank and file that is soon to come advancing, column after column, over the hill, the banners of the corn flying,

the bladed wheat shining like bayonets in the sun. But the metaphor is superficial. No martial simile suits the green hosts of the grain; they resemble no army, unless it be the industrial army of workers. They exist for utility's sake, without flower, without colour, without fragrance, in their lives of crowded uniformity. They are the bread-makers of the world: put through the mill, ground fine, to make men's bread. It may be the Sower looks on his toiling millions as on the wheat-field, and knowing the white kernel of humanity that lies at the heart of each, sees the broad purpose the reaping shall fulfil.

I asked the sentry if he killed the birds; he looked such a kindly creature that I didn't believe he could kill anything. He confessed as much; but he could frighten them away, and his shoulder was sore from the recoil of that aged gun. I used to go and pace his beat with him sometimes, for he belongs to a type growing rarer, I am told, every day, but which one still meets occasionally in the country. They have the simplicity of saints, such rustics, and fill you with wonderment that in this hard, distrustful world any human being should be found so defenceless, so wanting in the

self-protective armour of reserve, caution or guile.

His place was later taken by a small boy, who wandered over the face of the greening earth like a will-o-the-wisp. On cold, rainy days he covered himself with numerous sacks, one on top of another, and underneath these layers an old coat many times too big, that must have come to him by gift or reversion. This small, shapeless scarecrow went flopping along the hill-crest, a thing of rags and tatters, uttering a prolonged ululation that daunted the heart of the most confident crow—a cry as wild and inarticulate as a wolf's howl. In the windy weather he reminded me of Edgar's fantastic rags and the lament "Poor Tom's a cold—poor Tom's a cold!" But the urchin was as merry as a grig, and dozens of small boys, interdicted from trying the fullest capacity of their lungs, look upon this opportunity of making the welkin ring, with envy. Indeed, our boot-boy turned up recently full of pride, announcing that he had a job to go rooking for Mr. Mullion and asking if his younger brother might fill his place.

A flame of green, vivid, impressionist, impossible, covers the hillside; clouds write their autographs on it in light and shadow

that shower or sun are as swift to obliterate ;
and the lark rises, the small blithe singer
struggles up in the teeth of the wind—the
wind has a sharp tooth still—linking up
earth with heaven, brown soil to blue infinity,
with a silver thread of song.

XVIII.

THE Socialist has gone away, has fled precipitately, to evade the minions of the law ; so long as they don't know where he is, they are powerless to serve a summons. We were wondering what had become of him when a letter came this morning—sent with dramatic caution, under cover, by Chandler, who is his friend and ours—telling of the Hegira and its cause. A. declared that Vernon had made Chandler disguise his hand in the address, so elaborate were the precautions of secrecy.

It's odd I've never mentioned Vernon before, we have seen so much more of him than of anyone else ; he was always coming to dinner and to play chess with A. in the evenings, dropping in about tea-time to bring a pound or two of butter—to the continual scandal of our maid, who was very contemptuous of his rusty, ramshackle little cart, his moth-eaten pony, his farmyard

boots, corduroys and felt hat, and resentful of his muddy dog, which he fetched in to sit, wet and dirty, on the morocco of the dining-room chairs. Vernon habitually wore a red neck-tie, and I used to ask him if he did that on principle—principle plays such a conspicuous part in Vernon. He wants to suffer for it, to be immolated; full of that self-flagitious passion of the very young. He strips himself, to invite the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, like a Saint Sebastian.

How strangely Vernon comes into the environment here! He was the only person we had known before; we knew him, or rather A. knew him, as the son and, presumably, the heir—a presumption much imperilled—of Ethelbert Ryerson, the millionaire. Ethelbert Ryerson is the worshipper of all that is most archaic, most stable, most conservative; Vernon is the apostle of all that is most modern, most unsettling and most radical—in short, he is Ethelbert's reaction against himself; the swing of his pendulum. At Oxford, of all places in the world, he became an agnostic and a socialist; but just how serious the difference between father and son might have been, had it remained based only on religion and politics,

there's no saying ; it acquired the last touch of personal intensity when it became a difference about love, as well. Vernon put his theory into practice by falling in love with the idea of social equality as embodied in his landlady's daughter. Unfortunately, the idea, or the embodiment, is older than he, which gives a greater tenacity, a greater *feminine* tenacity, anyhow, to the tie.

The father tried all ways ; he invoked the aid of the Church, but the Church was ineffectual—I doubt he would have despised the world, the flesh and the devil as allies at that juncture. These things failing in appeal, Vernon was sent to Australia. He came back as obstinate as ever ; absence had not made his heart grow fonder, but it had grown firmer. There's nothing like a good stiff varnish of principle to fix the colours of inconstant love. It was himself his constancy embraced more than her. His mother was no good in any of this, as he has since explained to us. "My mother is the representative of race—I don't know anything else she represents, particularly. From her I get Norman blood thinned by phthisis." An aunt, making her exit to another world, left a door ajar for him upon this. Her legacy of £600 gave him his liberty ; it was not

sufficient to give him much more. It did, however, suffice to buy a small croft high up under a shoulder of the downs about five miles from Kynaston, and it was there A. re-discovered him, engaged in the Scripturally appropriate occupation of feeding swine.

For just then all his hopes were centred in pigs. He had tried chickens first, before we came, and found out how much there was to be learned about chickens in practice, after you have learned all about them in theory; like Mulvaney's Lieutenant Brase-nose, he is "too fond av the theorisin'." I consulted him about the garden, he seemed to know so much by book about the ailments of plants, but several times the remedies he prescribed were more disastrous than the disease, and this rather shook my faith. Then, too, Old Johnny's attitude was boldly sceptical when I said to him, "Mr. Ryerson says we must do this, or mustn't do the other"; and once his scorn so mastered him that he spat upon the ground as the only adequate expression of his feelings, though this was scarcely respectful or polite.

We took tea with Vernon one afternoon last autumn, cutting across the wet fields and climbing to where his decrepit house sat cup-wise in a saucer of the hills. It's bad land,

and, while Vernon's fertilizers and intensive farming have done more to redeem it than the average farmer would have done, the average farmer would never have touched it in the first place. In the old house one had to tread warily not to put foot through the floors. In Vernon's small ground floor sitting-room were Homer, Æschylus, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Karl Marx, in three tongues, against the wall; and on the mantelshelf a few tanagra, picked up on a vacation tour in Greece; while, in the corner, the incubator served for a buffet: the same incubator in which those luckless chicks had been hatched that early fell victims to Vernon's theories—to his socialistic idea setting science above the crude natural instincts of maternity. He tried to sell me his hens; but I knew those fowls, discouraged by the lack of confidence in them, had shown the most callous indifference to race suicide and refused to lay.

His one assistant, a young farm-hand, lived with him fraternally, and the two of them did what house work and cooking was done; but "the boy" had a morbid passion for tinned salmon, eaten from the tin, and Vernon acquiesced in this labour-saving fare; he was even beginning to develop a liking for tinned

salmon himself. I offered to give them lessons in simple, wholesome cookery, and made suggestions about food, by which they have never tried to profit. I used to catch sight of Vernon's wolf when he came to us for meals.

"He's underfed—he's famished," I said to A. "He looks pinched and anæmic."

"It'll either kill or cure him—the life he's leading," he made answer.

"Nobody who cares for him would take the risk." I had a vision of Vernon, rising in the black dark and cold and rain of a winter's morning, on half a stomachful of tinned salmon, to feed his beasts; and of Mrs. Ethelbert Ryerson coming home a few hours earlier from some function in her motor-brougham, wrapped in furs, with a footman to open the door. I had seen her once: a tall, negative-looking woman, insufficiently warmed and coloured by that blue blood—thin and blue, for centuries had skimmed the cream of it.

When we came home from Italy, we heard that three of the pigs had succumbed to some obscure malady that pigs are heir to; and Vernon had neglected to copy the example of the farmer in the story, who, asked if he had not lost his pigs by swine fever, confessed

that he would have done so had he not "taken them in time." Vernon hadn't taken his in time, nor had he been very fortunate with his cows. He had bought them in the autumn, as he confessed to us, when the grazing was going off, and had to feed them all winter; then, one of them speedily went dry, the calf that was sold with her not being hers at all. A farmer friend had made that point clear to him when it was too late. And yet Vernon is rather a keen bargainer, according to A., who once accompanied him on a butter and apple selling round among his customers. Vernon would never have him again, for A.'s mirth, I gather, got out of bounds when Vernon was asked at cottage doors to hold the baby while the mother made the change.

"But why do you sell your cows now that the grass is so good?" I asked; and then Vernon elucidated his latest and greatest enthusiasm. He had decided to become a market-gardener. He was as sure of the pleasure as of the profits of the thing. Of course, he wasn't going in alone; he had found a man with an established business who would take him into partnership. Camp of Camp's Corner would furnish the experience, while he, Vernon, put in the proceeds

of the sale of the cows and of Cuckoldscomb Manor, the name of his absurd shanty, embodying what ancient local scandal we know not. The original tenant has long been dust: his wrongs and his shame interred with his forgotten bones; but the horned calumny lives on, nailed antler-wise above his door.

“*Cherchez la femme*,” said A., when he was gone; “it may or may not have something to do with it, but do you know the other day I passed Camp’s Corner and I stopped to ask about a lane. There was a girl in the garden, and she was a deuced pretty girl. Well, one nail drives out another, though it’s not a very appropriate comparison for a pink and yellow, soft young thing like that. I wonder if our young friend is mixing up business with sentiment?”

Vernon’s subsequent behaviour does give some colour to the surmise. What but the most proverbial of all blindnesses could have so blinded him to the cold hard figures of his bank-book, that he forgot to deduct outstanding cheques that had not been cashed. For the combined total realized by the sale of the cows and the ancient Manor of Cuckoldscomb did not suffice to pay off past scores and give a fresh start in the market-gardening business; “and a good job too,” as A. said—

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“good for Vernon, good for old Camp, and a dashed good thing for old Camp’s daughter.”

“What about the first love—you don’t think——?”

“I’ll pit principles against paternal authority, but I won’t pit them against female propinquity—that is, not pretty propinquity”; and those are more big words in one sentence than I ever heard A. use before.

But Vernon is lost to us, and we miss him. We miss his delicate pats of butter, for the Socialist’s hands were as clean as his boots were filthy; we miss his abuse of Society, and of ourselves, for whatever feeble qualified adherence we are supposed to give to Society. We miss his enthusiasm for the General Idea. I used to like to watch him spinning the thread of his theory very fine, letting himself down to the end of it, like a spider, and hanging there—nowhere touching ground.

He is a clever youth, so clever that he’s a little inhuman, and, like all lovers of *Man* rather than of *Men*, a great egoist.

XIX.

My seeds—the seeds sown out-of-doors—are coming up—the candytuft, the Shirley poppies, the daisies, the cornflowers, the mignonette, the gypsophila—all of them coming up thick and fast.

It never ceases to be a miracle to me when the seeds I plant come up. I don't mean that as a reflection on my planting; I mean that the fact is in its nature miraculous. I feel a mimic Demeter, mother of seeds and flowers. In my small garden, in my small way, I play her part, and gather unto myself some of the earth-fullness of her great maternal pleasure when she walks between the greening furrows and sees a million million seeds hold up their hands to her.

“All things feast in the Spring's guest-chamber.”

The swallows arrived long ago; the larks are singing as if the very heavens would break up in joy; the thrush has come down from

leading tenor to a place in the chorus. I wonder why one reads so much about the skylark and so little about the thrush in English books? The thrush is to me the finest singer of the lot—barring always, of course, the nightingale—and the only persistent optimist I was ever able to endure. The worse the weather is, the louder he chants, and on a blustorous, raw, drizzling, east-windy afternoon in early March, you may hear him proclaiming like an insistent Mental Scientist :

“ It isn’t so bad—it isn’t—it isn’t—it isn’t !

Error of mortal mind—you only think so—you only think so ! ”

Browning was the thrush among English poets, with his odd, irregular metre, his intentional roughnesses and stridencies, his drolleries, his touches of quaint humour. It is he who has given the thrush permanent poetic expression, impressed into an immortal line or two ; but Keats has written a short poem to “ The Thrush in February ” :

“ Oh, fret not after knowledge—I have none,
And yet my song comes native to the warmth ;
Oh, fret not after knowledge—I have none,
And yet the evening listens.”

That may be wrong—I quote not by the

book, but in the hope that memory will not tamper with lines she has held dear.

On the whole, I think it is in English *prose* that the thrush has not had his due. His song is very like that of our mocking-bird, so like that I am continually tantalized by its identities and differences. Both have the thrush habit of mimicry; but the song of our bird is far richer, fuller, sweeter and more varied.

The clock of the year is striking spring—spring—spring! The cuckoo is calling from the wood behind the house. Early in the morning I lie and listen to him, for it is then that his call comes with peculiar charm. It has a matutinal freshness, an urgency, a summons, and all things else about it drawn from daytime and the cheerful dawn. It is trochaic; and who does not concede the effectiveness of the trochee? A sanguine and a happy note, all *l'allegro*; the temperamental optimism and assurance of the bird are embodied in it. On him responsibility sits lightly. The gipsy, vagabond, socialist of his tribe, the laws that govern the family and the home are not to bind. His wife, too, is a feathered suffragette, who asserts the rights of her sex, and, emancipated from maternal cares and domestic life, adopts

the community system. Having something better to do than sit on eggs all day, she deputizes this duty.

The cuckoo is no poet : he has no passion, no imagination, no invention. His utterance is limited to one monotonous and mechanical phrase. The clock that is his mimic has called our attention to that. You almost detect the burr-r-r of the released spring in his throat. To some his song is damnable iteration, but the monotony is redeemed by his inveterate restlessness—flitting from copse to copse, from hill to hill, the moving voice calls us now here, now there. No other bird has a note so human—no, not human, elemental—the voice of hills and dales, the voice of the mocking nymph, the voice of spring playing at hide-and-seek through all the woods.

How the cuckoo captured the fancy of the Elizabethans ! For Shakespeare he was *the* herald of spring, and he turns up again and again, furnishing the refrain, “Sing, Cuckoo ! Sing, Cuckoo !” Perhaps this is because he is so imitable, and we can answer, paying him back in his own coin, when we are hopelessly the debtors of other birds. Fancy mimicking the “bubbling” of the nightingale or the trilling of the lark on our hoarse, oaten pipes ! Even Shakespeare could follow

the nightingale no further than that preliminary tuning of the instrument—"Jug—jug—jug," he makes him say—not very happily, for not the most insensitive spirit can associate him with jugs. (I am never sure whether I should be ornithologically or classically correct, and say him or her; but in this connection I suppose it should be him.) He may bring, as to Keats, an image of "the true, the blushful Hippocrene, with beaded bubbles winking at the brim"; but when was such a vintage born of jugs?

I don't know whether Chaucer is responsible for our linking the names of cuckoo and nightingale. They come about the same time—so when I heard the cuckoo's loud announcement of his arrival, I realized that the more secret harbinger was due, and we set out last night to surprise his earliest prelude. Where we would be likeliest to find him was a question, as we know nothing of his haunts in this locality.

"Where would you sing if you were a nightingale?" A. asked me. "That's as good a toss-up as any."

It was easy enough to answer that. A nightingale with any poetry in his soul would choose the wood by the lake. He would be as perfectly staged as if he were in Italy.

Darkling we listened, strained towards the silence of the trees. Not a sound. Then, of a sudden, some wild duck, startled from its slumber, uttered a series of quacks—flat, nasal and resounding, as if the comedian should waddle on the boards at that hushed moment that expects the lover.

We heard no nightingale, but as we crossed the field, returning reluctant and unrewarded, we met Head just going home from the farm. Old Hook, the waggoner, has a swollen tooth, and Head had been to feed his horses.

Plodding, hodden figure, what had he to do with the enchanter of magic casements, the silver-voiced celebrant of night? Yet it was he who had told us where to find the wood anemones and the white violets, and of the kingfisher's nest. We stopped and asked him had he heard a nightingale.

"Down by Bladon's Wood—there's where you'll hear 'em. One sang there all last May, and another further along, by the chalk-pit. My father-in-law, he heard one last Sunday evenin' by the mill—that's another place. They mostly likes a sandy soil."

"Why sandy?" I asked. "Is it on account of their food?"

"Yes'm. They likes it to scratch in, and

they finds the kind o' worms they fancies, I s'pose."

Whether this fact be true to natural history I cannot vouch, being accustomed to consider nightingales in their less material aspects; but it seemed an earthy period to put to our quest.

"He told me the other day," said A., our thoughts pursuing Head, moving with his methodical, old-man's step, away from us into the shadows of the lane—"that he doesn't know how old he is. Somewhere between thirty and forty—that's as close as he can come."

"Of course, he doesn't. It's the monotony makes them lose count: no milestones to reckon by, no *dies memorabilis* to look back on, none to look forward to. I never saw him walk any faster or any slower—just plod, plod, plod. He'll walk on at that same gait, never quickening, never slowing, to his grave. It's monotony that makes people old: everything that cuts us off from hope, from chance, from possibilities, from life's great Peradventure, ages us; everything that shuts a door. That's why marriage makes us feel so much older—it shuts doors for us—the doors that open on Romance, Adventure, the Unknown, on Freedom and the Quest."

"So those are your real feelings in regard to marriage?" A. inquired politely.

"Oh, you needn't worry. A good many of those doors were closed to me long ago, and some I turned the key in myself. And if I had got wherever they lead, I should probably have found those places empty—and a lot emptier without marriage."

"How can emptiness be emptier? Feminine logic! Thank God, here's one door that isn't locked," he said, as he turned the handle and admitted us. "The maid's out—isn't she?—and I left my latch-key at home."

XX.

LILACS, Guelder roses, red may and white, and the great spikes of chestnut blossom high above them all, they *do* make a charming colour-medley on the knoll !

The German irises have their flags fluttering, and the rockeries are masses of white saxifrage, aubretia and forget-me-nots. We put in slabs of the saxifrages last autumn and they have spread wonderfully. I wonder whether the stream slips through any other gardens and gets invited to a flower fête by the way, or whether it carries the starry memory of my saxifrages with it down to the sea. Once, I know, it is confined in a dark, dank vault and serves a short sentence to hard labour, emerging angrily and foaming in a waterfall, but the mill-pond almost makes amends for this with its water-lilies, when they are in bloom.

I have found a new use for the stream. I set my boxes of seedlings in it, near the

bank. I was almost in despair, having tried three different watering-pots to get a fine enough rose, the jets from all of them coming so strong as to lay flat the thread-like stems of the frailer plantlings, and do much havoc. And then this very simple expedient, that any clever person would have thought of at once, was pointed out to me.

I have a tall vase of old Chinese Medalion ware, decorated with sprays of cherry blossom in relief, and ever since the hawthorn began to bud, I have dreamed of filling that vase, but I waited until the boughs were all one cloud of white. I broke great branches, filled the vase, and placed it on a tabaret in the centre of the room.

“Casting the body’s vest aside

My soul into the boughs does glide.”

And I was sitting cross-legged like a Japanese and worshipping it when Lucy came in with the tea-tray, which she nearly dropped.

“Oh, if you haven’t gone and brought may into the house, ma’am!” was her horror-stricken exclamation. “It’s trouble and death—that’s what it means,” she answered my bewilderment. “My mother wouldn’t never let us touch it when we was children.”

I felt annoyed with her for darkening my white cloud with this threat, this shadow of superstition. Of course I didn't believe a word of it, but my pleasure was dulled. I had been so happy choosing those boughs.

Presently there arrived one of those young women who do not let even the grass of spring grow under their feet in the furtherance of charity, with tickets for a concert.

"Do sit down now you're here and have a cup of tea with me," I suggested, but she still stood hesitating in the doorway.

"I'm sorry, but I can't—I really can't—not with that may in the room. I wouldn't sit down with it for anything. What made you bring it into the house?"

I pooh-poohed the notion as the bogey of some careful housekeeper who didn't wish litter made of her floors—hawthorn is trashy ; but we had tea in the dinning-room out of deference to the feelings of my guest. Yet after she had gone I couldn't be quite comfortable with my blooms any more. Those minatory words "trouble and death—trouble and death" kept ringing in my ears. That's how superstitions are propagated. A word sows them : the fearful heart of mankind that sees so much sorrow and mischance on all sides, and moves amid so much un-

certainly, is always ready to accept the omen. But that sinister influences should be associated with this lovely flowering thing is strange.

Here is the shadow of paganism without the substance. We don't even justify ourselves by believing in a white-thighed nymph, beloved of Apollo, behind the bark, who revenges the ravishment of a limb ; or in the souls of the tree-people that come out of their bodies, as in one of Fiona M'Leod's tales, like thin green flames, and move about the silent wood.

When evening came I carried out my flowering boughs—I couldn't bear to see them in the dust-heap—and laid them in the dewy grass where the petals fluttered down from their kindred overhead, and left them. For I am superstitious ; it's in my Celtic blood. My reason knows better—knows there is no forecasting, and it is only when Experience, the sole Horuspex, has struck the stroke, and holds the yet warm and bleeding heart of the Present in his hand, that the will of the gods is clear.

XXI.

I SUPPOSE there is always some key of our waking thought that unlocks and lets us into that particular territory of Dreams in which we find ourselves. The part in which I found myself last night was certainly familiar enough : it bore every resemblance to a well-known London square, enclosed by buildings so brilliantly illuminated as to suggest the limelight, without as within, and to throw a theatric glare upon the men and women who walked its pavements.

My attention was concentrated on a woman, a small quiet figure in grey, standing irresolute. A man came out of one of the gay cafés and she went timidly up to him. His face told her he was one to ask.

“I beg your pardon,” she stammered, “but could you tell me—I am a stranger here and I have something valuable to sell.”

At the word he drew back quickly from

her eagerness. "I am sorry," he said, with a gesture of refusal, "but——"

"I didn't expect you to buy," she made haste to explain, though as she spoke it occurred to her that maybe what she had to offer was just that of which he stood in need. "I want only your advice. You see I am trying to sell my soul."

"Your soul!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"The person who is dearest to me in the world is in immediate need of money. I would sell my soul to help him. Indeed, it is all I have to sell. In the country, where I live, nearly everyone has a soul of his own, and so I came to London."

"A short supply is supposed to create a good market," he said. "As for myself, I already have one, such as it is; it's rather jaundiced, but I don't know that I'd part with it in exchange for the freshest, youngest, most roseate soul going. A cynic's soul is like a meerschaum pipe; life's but a vapour that he inhales, exhales again, to colour his philosophy. My soul is stained with all the poison of life that has passed through it, still, it's rather a fine shade of brown: I'm afraid I'm proud of it on the whole."

"I've so often read of persons selling their souls to the Devil. There was the Countess

Cathleen . . . I thought it would be easy," she said, plaintively.

"The Devil! I don't know him. I shouldn't object to the acquaintance," the Cynic answered. "You've come to the right place . . . those lamps out there"—he pointed into the yellow nimbus of the square in front of the theatre—"are his altar lights, and these"—with an inclusive wave of his cigar—"his votaries. But, my dear child, I don't believe the Devil would care to buy a soul that was being sacrificed for the sake of another person; neither do I think he would care for a fresh country soul. His taste in them is like the cultivated taste for quail—preferring them in the first stages of decomposition. Natural, I suppose, though Dante says there's ice enough to keep them on in Hell."

"They," she nodded towards two painted girls who passed laughing and ogling. "Are they going to sell their souls?"

"Not they, or they wouldn't make much by the transaction. Their bodies are saleable, but their souls, I should say, are pretty rum."

She caught sight of a crow's foot on her cheek in the big glass show-window behind her, and sighed.

A carriage rolled by, a coronet was on its

panels ; two women, dressed for the opera, sat in it : one was no longer young. He saw that her glance followed.

“So far from buying,” he commented, “they are anxious to get rid of the little souls they have—squander ’em, waste ’em, fritter ’em away. A soul’s inconvenient, detrimental, makes grey hairs, spoils sport, even rudimentary souls such as theirs. They keep them shut up. Their lap-dogs get an airing once a day, their souls once a week, and then only a little run to church on a chain. Shall we walk on ? ”

They walked, and the Cynic talked of bodies versus souls, puffing out the pungent conclusions of the meerscham philosophy, till they saw a man in front of them fumbling a latch-key in a door.

“My friend, the famous Author,” said the Cynic. “By the way, there’s your chance. He vivisects souls. The very thing ! I’ll take you to him,” he proposed.

The Cynic went with her, and when he had stated the case to the famous Author, he said he would leave her because the Author might wish to examine her soul before he bought it. So he said “good-bye,” and after he had gone she and the soul felt lonelier than ever.

The Author said that heretofore he had

studied souls when they did not know he was studying them ; that was the virtue of his method ; the disadvantage was that there were moments which were denied him. If he bought a soul outright he would be able to keep it under constant observation, not a motion would escape him, not an impulse, however subtle and obscure. . . . He would now bring his glass to bear upon this one in a preliminary examination. He put out his hand and switched off the electric light. In the dark the soul became faintly luminous.

With microscope and magnifying glass, long he scrutinized it. When at last he put the light on again, he turned a disappointed face upon its owner.

"I find—ahem—" he began, "I find that it is altogether natural, normal and healthy—singularly without symptoms of disease. I regret to say that I do not think an entirely normal soul, one that presents no interesting pathological conditions, would be of the slightest use to me."

As she was going, taking with her the soul that was not wanted, he suddenly be-thought himself.

"I know a Philosopher who lives round the corner. His deepest interest is the soul and that which constitutes it. I am sure he

would like one for experiment, and while your soul would not be of much service to the psychological novelist, it would answer his every purpose. He lives so near here, you might as well try. I'll give you a letter of introduction, if you like."

She waited while he wrote, and then presented her note at the house round the corner. The Philosopher came out of his study to her, where she sat expectant in the hall, with the note in his hand.

"My dear lady," he said, smiling, "I need not detain you, for the fact is, I have brought my conclusions further than my friend the Author is aware. I have established beyond doubt that there is no such thing as the soul. You are labouring under the common delusion which mistakes a set of nerve reflexes and physical reactions—ah; well, there's no need to go into that—but I can assure you positively the soul does not exist."

It was late as she left the Philosopher's. She had never seen the soul face to face, but to reassure herself, she drew half-way from her girdle the little glass which she carried as most women carry a vanity-box, in which she sometimes caught glimpses. Then she saw how drooping, how dwindled, how discouraged it looked.

A dog crept up and touched her hand, a stray dog of the streets. She looked down, its eyes were fixed wistfully, worshipfully upon the soul in a passion of dumb desire for the divine, the unattainable possession.

* * * * *

Those reverent, agate-brown eyes followed me out of the dream into the waking: they were all clear enough, Cynic, Novelist, Philosopher, the Soul itself, and their after-images lingered a moment in my daylight consciousness, before that importunate knocking at the door wholly shattered the stuff that they were made of.

It was not the dreamland door that was thus summoned, but the substantial oak of my bedroom, on which A.'s knuckles beat a reveille.

"Eight o'clock! I say, it's come!"

"What's come?" I answered drowsily.

"That cheque. It's all right—and the other one, too. We're on velvet. Thought I'd tell you—I saw you were worrying, though you'd no business to. Oh, you needn't think because you don't say anything, I can't tell when you're worrying."

XXII.

I'M rather amused at the Vicar. He came the day before yesterday to borrow a book. A. was out, so I took him up to the study to choose.

"What will you have—history?" I said, with malicious intent, for I know the Vicar likes novels. Of course, as a person of light and leading, he had to say he wasn't averse to history.

We ran over the contents of the shelves devoted to our modest stock of history and biography.

"You won't want that," I said, seeing his finger pause upon a volume, "that's a naughty book."

"*The Memoirs of the Count de Grammont*," read the Vicar. "What do you mean by naughty?"

"*Chronique scandaleuse*."

"What is its character?" the Vicar pursued judicially.

"Gossip—gossip, very spicy. But you might pretend to read it as history."

The Vicar rebuked this impertinence by ignoring it.

"I'll take this one," he said, selecting an instructive book about Guiana, from a case of travels.

I thought it unbecoming to mention that I myself had read the *Memoirs* while in my tender teens, a fact accounting probably for an exaggerated impression of their naughtiness.

I saw he was longing to take *De Grammont* home with him, but a scruple, perhaps the fear that I might think he hankered after improper literature, withheld him, and he turned the matter over in his mind until the next day, when he sought out A., who was "having a knock," for practice, on the cricket field.

"By the way," he said solemnly, "about that book of *Memoirs*. What is its character—is it actually—er—er——?"

And the very next afternoon—this afternoon—beheld him entering at our gate, under his arm the *Travels in Guiana*, which he purposed to exchange.

"He's come for *De Grammont*," I said to myself, and sure enough I recognized the

covers of the two volumes that accompanied his departure, and waylaid him on the walk.

"You found *Guiana* dull, didn't you? I knew you would. You're taking those? You'll enjoy them, I'm sure."

He looked a little red and foolish, did the Vicar, but who can blame him? Is not this Rogation week, when he has had to preach six sermons inside as many days?

I, too, am having my reaction. I confess it, without shame I confess it. I'm sick of the garden, utterly sick of it. I look on the ravages of slug and aphid, caterpillar and thrip with apathy. For weeks I have done nothing but pant behind the green skirts of summer in a hopeless race. No sooner is a thing done, than it has to be done over again, and you feel like a foolish volunteer Danaid, standing and pouring water into the earth from a watering-pot.

The explanation of a state of mind is a state of body. I have had a touch of illness, and one or two feverish nights. The dark is the great confessional. To those small, sleepless hours I make my abject acknowledgment; the pettiness of my activities and my aims; the emptiness of my knowledge. If I were dropped on a strange planet to-morrow, what positive knowledge would I carry with

me to pollinate that new world? Scarcely a grain. I, who have touched inventions at every turn; spent my life travelling in railways; using taxi-cabs and telephones. It is an appalling thought. The waste of life takes hold on you suddenly like a terror; hurry seizes you as a panic. Last night I lit my night lamp to get rid of it, but still the endless, insignificant details of my biography continued to defile before me, as if it were a serial without end by Henry James. So I scribbled down these verses as an escape:

The clock ticks heavily; the night lamp burns:

I lie through sleepless hours and watch them
crawl,

The locust-eaten years with scant returns

Between me and the shadow on the wall.

Along the desert's scarce defined road

That shifting dust and winds obliterate

The Caravan of the Years, each with its load

Moves on until it enters at the Gate.

From each that kneeleth in its weary track,

The Master samples with a gauging hand,

And finds the burden that hath galled its back

No more than sand—no more than desert sand.

* * * * *

So loud grows memory when the house is still.

I hear the years like water run away—

Waste water that runs past an idle mill

As hour succeedeth hour and day to day.

Such half-filled measures of Experience!

With far and near World's-Wonder to explore.
Oh come To-morrow, quick in every sense,
Surely the Great Adventure waits beyond the
door.

But the feeling has lasted into the daylight hours. I seem to be suffering the old Greek metamorphosis, and turning into a tree-woman, striking roots in the soil and the bark closing over me.

My new bark will be worse than ten-times my old bite, to quote Lowell's punning Daphne poem. My personality is dwindling to a pin-point. In Nature's looking-glass world you suffer strange dilations and contractions of personality, and live with Alice's magic mushroom in hand, so that one moment your head is touching the stars and the next your chin is resting on your instep. Both the fullness and the emptiness of self come of realization of your place in the great whole. Spring lifts you on a flood-tide, and this is the reaction.

But all this talk about the narrowing effect of living in the country—is it true? We are afraid to be left alone with ourselves, and when we are thus left and take stock of our ideas, finding them small—so pitifully small—we say it is the country and solitude that is

responsible for this sudden poverty. But do people in town get any more truth out of life; any more knowledge of the absolute and eternal verities? They get more acquaintance with the individual and relative, of course, and they never stop to take stock of themselves. If they did, they might find their acquisitions chiefly gossip. The fly off the wheel isn't much more important than the country fly. There's only one mind in a million that can live on abstract ideas and not starve to death in a week. The country confines us to our abstract ideas; sets them all out upon the table, and confronts us with the imminent danger of famine. Town makes innumerable appeals to the eye and the ear, but when all is said, few actually to the mind. It's all objective, all gossip. But then, life is gossip—history is mainly gossip—fiction is gossip, more or less analytical.

“How can a writer of fiction live without gossip, without personalities; live away from his base of supplies?” Edith demands of A. Every now and then she descends upon us for a day, and I am conscious of her wonder at me; that I am content to be but a green thought in a green shade. She arrives like a runner from the battle, and her talk is the dust of action brushed upon us; literally from

the battle, for she is an ardent suffragist, and comes from the thick of the woman's war.

"If you didn't sympathize with us so keenly, I could understand you better," she says to me, meaning she could respect me more.

"My convictions are strong, but my legs are weak. I cannot walk in processions," I assure her. "I do not believe in smashing windows in the literal way; it lets in no light upon them that sit in darkness. Smashing heads is the way men have made their reforms—but I do not counsel it—and property has always been more valuable than life."

"You might enlist your pen for us" Edith says. "You could do that even here."

I cannot write about anything so apparent and so true, just as one cannot write about anything so obvious as noonday or God. To me it is so evident a right that it leaves no room for argument. I can't think of anything to say, though Edith grows impatient when I explain this.

"You can lead an ass to water, but you cannot make him drink. This particular ass will not drink for fear of disturbing the flattering reflection of himself. It is the donkey Narcissus of male egotism that opposes you, the most obstinate ass going."

It sounded so laboured and sententious that I was ashamed of myself, but Edith announced, "I shall use that in my very next speech."

I used not to understand the violence of English women in regard to the suffrage. I understand better and better every day. It is feudalism that weighs on them, one of the last tyrannies of its traditions, the aristocratic tradition of the headship of the house and the governance and authority of the male. One doesn't find it in countries where women have been pioneers with men, and have had the same democratic chance—in countries like America and Australia. It is true that in most parts of America women do not have the suffrage, but they have all the rights or privileges that touch them more vitally and personally and immediately. They have all the spirit if they lack the letter. . . .

When I hear Englishmen making the worn-out statement about woman's sphere being the home, which modern economic conditions have made so obsolete and inadequate, I am always tempted to retort with my conviction that it is because even in that natural province her independence has been so restricted and masculine authority has

pressed upon her, that she has been driven into the open with her protest. The Englishman is master in his house where the American woman is mistress. I daresay both countries bristle with exceptions, but broadly speaking, I believe Englishwomen are made to feel their economic and financial dependence in the home where American women do not feel it. If the male arrogance of the Englishman were only political and did not permeate all relations of life, I doubt the Suffragettes would go to such extremes.

I have made a number of small observations to confirm my views, but the most amusing instance is quite recent. Only the other day a military gentleman, whom I have named the Crimson Rambler, from his florid countenance and disjointed talk, called on A. to ask for "the character" of a maid who had been in our service. It seemed to me that I was obviously the person to ask, but this gentleman always interviews and engages the servants in his house ; parlour-maid and cook, as well as groom and gardener, and evidently concluded that A. was equally the arbiter in such matters. If the wives of men like that smash windows—feeling that they must smash something—it is a futile but comprehensible manifestation.

XXIII.

EDITH's visit left me with the sort of hunger for London that a vegetarian convert, in a sudden relapse, may have for underdone beef-steak—the demand of life for blood, as well as chlorophyl, in its veins. So that when, a few days later, A. had a letter from the M.'s, saying that they were to be in Scotland, and offering us their flat for a few weeks, we looked across the breakfast-table, and, as the writers of romance are addicted to saying, read the answer in each other's eyes.

“I've got to go to a tailor,” A. said, “and I suppose you have to, too—and we don't want to waste our time in that way while we're there. Besides, they'd keep us waiting for the things. We'll run up to-morrow for the day. How will that suit you?”

The tailor came first; and then, as A. was lunching at his club to have a “man-talk,” I was left with a whole day to use, and the Pippa-like feeling: “if I waste one wavelet

of thee, one mite of my twelve hours' treasure." I remember Charles Lamb used to be seized, on a holiday, with such an agony of apprehension lest he should not make the most of every moment, that the greater part of the time was consumed in considering how he should spend it.

And what do you think I did, after all, with this day of town? I went to the Flower Show.

The love of gardening is a sort of freemasonry. It roots us in human sympathy. I've found that out in the country, leaning over a fence and asking a cottager how he made things grow; and in drawing-rooms, where there was nothing else in common, it has furnished a blessed escape, and has even led once or twice from the boredom indoors to green alleys and plaisaunces outside. It must have been the staple subject of conversation in Eden during those early weeks. It is almost as universal a topic as the weather, and is less easily exhausted.

And this came home to me more than ever at the Flower Show. Not among the orchids, which I visited first. Those gorgeous Cattleyas are the millionaire's hobby; to them pertains the exclusiveness of riches; and their purpose, more than beauty,

is luxury—to give the sense of possessing something another man hasn't and can't afford to have. They are the collector's flower.

One or two fashionably-dressed persons strolled about with an air of connoisseurship, regretting the absence of a special variety from their own greenhouses. A florist talked to the attendant at one of the stalls in terms of perfect familiarity with the polysyllabic, weirdly-compounded names. Once a gentleman in top-hat and frock-coat was heard pointing out his selections for purchase when the exhibition should close; and humbler folk turned to gaze after the opulence that bought fabulous orchids as they would buy sixpennyworth of sweets.

But for the most part the people looked at the orchids as they look at strange and curious animals at the Zoo, and with none of the intimacy and affection with which they would regard a dog show. The flowers themselves wore an air of exotic detachment. Their very hues, where they did not wear the royal purples of the more regal forms of *Cattleyas*, were full of aesthetic distinction. None of your common, healthy, open-air pinks and blues, but browns and bronzes, and such shades as *Paquin* or *Liberty* might

blend in the chic harmonies of my lady's gown.

Curiosity or interest was the note with them ; but not love. One might feel a passion for collecting orchids, but I can't imagine anybody loving them. The *Cypripediums*, it is true, are full of elfish charm ; standing all erect like the music desks of Oberon's private orchestra, with a bar of music-text scrolled legibly on those long petals curving with their grace-note flourish. The *sarracenia* gave me a touch of revolt—not the flowers, but the traps. It seems a run backward of the wheel that the vegetable should prey upon the animal.

The structural mysteries of those strange golden halls and atriums ; those tortuous passages in which the bee is waylaid and robbed ; those intricate mechanisms, snares, pitfalls, lures, and baths that delay his entrance and initiation ; do not give up their secret to the eye. We must learn them from the microscope, or read of them, invested with symbolic significance, in the poetry of Maeterlinck's essay. Yet, even so, they seem like a voluptuous and elaborate rite of the Cytherean when compared with the simpler processes of fertilization in simpler flowers.

The sight of this mass of beauty, so infinitely varied in form and colour, so marvellous in detail, oppressed me with the great mystery that evolution has never fully explained. Is it all only the sign painted above Life's door, asking for custom that the business may be carried on? I saw the face of Nature beautified with a hundred artifices, designed to one allurements, to one seduction, like that of a courtesan. Is life, then, so beautiful that the approach partakes of it, or are life and love so full of after pain that we must be bribed to pursue them?

I made the round of the roses with a fellow-enthusiast that chance placed at my side. I lent her a pencil to make a note of "Alberto Calamet" and gorgeous "Richmond"; and so we mingled our admiration before "Bardou Job," with its dusky crimsons like that dark wine—that "drowsy red Aleatico," perhaps—"ink with a drop or two of life-blood in it, like that in which Shakespeare dipped his pen" (I quote without the book, but in some such phrase runs a paragraph of Lowell's) or "Lyon" rose, splendid with copper pinks and pinkish coppers of a sunset blend; or "Juliet," sultry as the tropical sunrise that prophesies typhoon. This last was the rose that moved one old

lady to inveigh against new-fangled florists and their methods. The gardens of her youth knew no such hybrids. With Perdita, she disapproved the art "that shares with great creating nature."

Full as I was of marvel at the artists who work in the living stuff—"God's collaborators," I said suddenly, before I knew it, at her ear, and fled. But not without looking back once at her staring after me, startled, outraged and astonished. She left me sore with a sense of this blemish of intolerance on the otherwise perfect Perdita. Did the prettiest lass that ever ran on the greensward harden into a carping old conservative, sticking to the outlandish in bonnets, and disapproving the dress, minds, manners of her grandchildren?

What would she have to say to those great lilies we have painted? It would be a daring breeze indeed that would essay "to sport with Amaryllis in the shade"—this Amaryllis. We no longer exact that even flowers shall be what their parents were before them, and shall not evolve, through culture, whatever capacities of growth, beauty and development lie hidden in themselves.

The poets seem against hybridization, at least when they wish to enforce the note of

pure naturalness in their heroines. I remember, too, that Browning's little silk-winding girl of Asola rebukes her pansy for

“petals triply swollen,
Three times spotted, thrice the pollen,”

and concludes

“Call this pampered thing improved now ! ”

I *do* call it improved. And next to the rose, the sweet-pea has benefited most. From the “wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white” of the original type, what innumerable harmonies and shadings : pinks that die away, *diminuendo*, into cream ; mauves that melt through scarce distinguishable minors into white ! If the orchid is our most aristocratic flower, this is the most democratic. The newest and most expensive varieties cost only a shilling or two to raise.

It was the last day of the exhibition, and the rest of us watched enviously while the young man in charge of the stall culled a spray or two from one after another of the tall stands of sweet-peas, and presented them to a postman who had just done his round of delivery. The postman was a grower of sweet-peas, it seemed, and from his lips we caught fragments of the familiar terminology—references to “substance,” “Spencers,”

“selfs,” “plain standards,” “rogues”—all the things I’ve read about in my book. For I have a book about sweet-peas, and about nothing else.

In front of me, a lady, smartly gowned, was almost touching elbows with a shabby person of the workman class, as they compared experience in regard to “Audrey Crier.”

“And did it come true for you?” I heard her say. “It is most undependable, you know.”

In his answer was a note of humble wonder that the capricious beauty, which had played the lady and her gardeners false, should have condescended to come true for him.

“That very colour, ma’am, mine was—that very colour.”

I had a swift vision of what flowers mean to the poor; to lives otherwise stunted of beauty and colour, of artistic possession and realization. They take the place of music, pictures and poetry. On the humblest they confer the proud consciousness of connoisseurship, and, on a village scale, the competitive zest of the exhibitor. They withhold pennies from the public-house, and fill the scanty leisure with ministry to an ideal.

It seemed to me that everybody must leave that tent fairly flooded with thanksgiving ; thanking God for flowers, for that divinest clemency of nature, through which "June may be had by the poorest comer." As for me, I was quite choky in the throat, and ready to overflow at the eyes.

XXIV.

THE flower show has sharpened my appetite for flowers once more, and it has made me especially keen on roses. The garden of my childhood boasted a hundred and seventy-five rose varieties ; but, while I used to gather a basketful with which to dress the house, my interest in them was superficial and non-possessive. The roses were my Aunt's hobby. Now I shall never be happy until I have Austrian yellow, Austrian copper, American pillar and Hiawatha, among the climbers, and somewhere, quite remote from these, of course, the glorious climbing Caroline Test-out. One learns rapidly at these exhibitions ; it's like a great case of samples where each preference may pick and choose. I have learned of three or four alpine that I must have for my rockery—*achillea* the pearl, *azalea rosae-flora*, this only costs half-a-crown, but it is the loveliest of all—*geranium Lancastriense*, *Houstonia serpyllifolia*, *Litho-*

spernum heavenly blue, and the saponarias, not forgetting the charming little *viola gracilis*, the daintiest of the violas for a rockery. Also I learned that Ware makes a speciality of these. Then I made a note of half-a-dozen varieties of hardy ferns for that portion of the stream's bank lying in deep, unbroken shade, and of the grower's name—Amos Perry of Enfield—for not all florists concern themselves with hardy ferns. I saw the value and variety of the tall, beautiful phloxes, and set down a list of names that would give me the colours I desire; and the pretty *Canadensis* is a low-growing variety one cannot do without. Some of those immense *Amaryllises*—I wonder whether I should say *Amarylli*?—and Ware's giant poppies would make the herbaceous border glowing; paint it with great splashes of impressionistic colour, effective a long way off, yet they seemed to me almost vulgarly splendid, almost a case where Pippa's point, and Perdita's, is well taken. If poppies are like pleasures spread, then these huge ones stand for nothing short of a champagne supper or the purple orgy of a millionaire.

The tree-peonies I longed after, but they, with many other too costly and exacting

plants, I dismissed as quite out of the question. Nor do they make the two large bushes of the old-fashioned double crimson sort, that are one of the few inheritances of my garden, look flaunting; their colour is so rich. I step out every now and again to gladden my eyes with it, even as the Lord of Montaigne says, "to judge well of the lustre of scarlet, we are taught to cast our eyes over it, in running it over by divers glances, sodaine glimpses, and reiterated reprisings."

I shall miss the delphiniums and the tall blue campanulas; it seems ungracious not to be here to welcome their first time of blossoming in my garden, when they have taken months to prepare for it, and now both they and I must wait another long year. A. says I can see them in other people's gardens, which is very like a man. And the little nemesias—they are darlings, but next time, if I must choose between them, I shall grow the fairy-like schizanthus instead.

What I could not have borne to miss is the golden meadows—sheets and sheets, acres and acres, of buttercups. In the evening, when the sunshine fades, the earth-shine emerges, wonderful, auriferous. The something mystic in this shining out of the

gloaming fields, is now plain to me ; with dusk, the burning buttercups close, and, looking up the hill slopes, I see them more in mass than when they lie flat and open in the grass by day.

I don't object to the daisies and buttercups on our lawns ; you cannot make these children of nature keep off the grass ; if you live next door to a meadow, they will stray in, and, after all, they are so pretty and cheerful that if we didn't get them for nothing we should prize them. A country lawn should not be kept all formal and ceremonious, in its best clothes and on its best behaviour, like a city plat. I don't mind its looking a bit dishevelled and happy and untidy. But the dandelions are another matter. How did they get their names ? Once, in the lion-house of Central Park Zoo, in New York, I saw a little child from the deserts of brick and stone beyond Third Avenue, to whom the flower was as unknown as the animal, point to a huge Nemean-looking beast, and cry : " Oh, look at the dandelion ! " whereupon the teacher in charge stepped in to enlighten. People who heard it laughed—they might have cried.

Although they are a pest, and make horrid deep pocks in the lawn when you try to dig

them out, I have been moved to apostrophize the dandelion thus :

Gray as the ashes of a burnt-out sun ;
 Frail as the orb in the young crescent's hold—
 (That gossamer sphere of thinnest shadow spun)
 Ghosts throng the lawn, of dandelion gold.

Small mimics of the Cosmic process vast,
 By which our systems focus and decay,
 From each faint nebula that floateth past
 New discs shall flame, like these now burned away.

Oh, light as Dante's lovers, on the wind,
 Spirits compelled as smoke the wind o'erpowers,
 Deathless desires that are not to bind
 Drive in these troops of disembodied flowers.

An armoury of arrows, every head :
 Darts winged and tipped with Love's invisible flame.
 Some find the mark; some miss and fall, chance-spied:
 Life is their target—life the eternal aim.

* * * * *

This morning I woke up at some unearthly hour, having stored my mind overnight, I suppose, with too many monitions about things to be done on this, the day we go to town.

Seeing daylight leaking in under the corner of the curtain, I rose, went to the window, and leaned out. There was a dense fog, not closing in on the house, but leaving a circle

clear around it—standing off from it blank and thick as a wall. It held the sun from rising, and the moon from setting; for there stood a great white moon in the fog, staring with pale, startled face, like a witch caught in her own spell.

I went back to bed, carrying the picture with me, and wondering if there is always such magic abroad before day, for early risers to find.

XXV.

FACES are wonderful—the most wonderful thing in the world. I never realized it until I lived in the country. In London, where you see dozens or hundreds or even thousands every day, you lose the power of seeing faces; you are blunted. But, coming fresh from fields of buttercups and daisies, and walking in this living parterre, I know it for the very garden of God. A crowd used to be no more to me than a pack of cards on legs, like that in *Alice in Wonderland*; the majority mere numerals, while a few kingly faces, queenly faces, knavish faces stood out as the face-cards of the pack. Now, all faces are significant—or nearly all. I understand why the Arab woman would rather bare her bosom than her face. The naked personality, the self-betrayal of those human visages startle one. They are such publishers of secrets, such babblers of private concerns.

For the first time I see faces as an artist sees them, and the streets become the background on which Life has drawn millions and millions of faces: some are finished and coloured, and some are but roughly sketched; no two are identical, and few are really alike. The same complement of features, the same elements of experience—love, sorrow, anxiety, greed, dissipation, pride and anger, boredom and lassitude, sickness and fatigue—the same passions engrossed on all, and yet the faces differ.

I see them through a certain medium of race-familiarity, and partly it is that which makes them differ to my eye more than the faces of other races. The people of any foreign country look alike until we become accustomed to them, for the national characteristics present themselves first, before we discover the individual traits, like a family likeness that tends to disappear as we become more intimate with its members. In the town-bred Englishman of to-day a number of nationalities often mingle and neutralize each other until only his mordant individuality, the product of keen competition, emerges, salient and dominant. With the Chinese and the Japanese, nationality is supreme; personality, at least upon the

surface, effaces itself. Lafcadio Hearn speaks of peeping through the screens of his kitchen one day, and catching unawares the hidden careworn look upon the face of his Japanese cook whom he had never, until then, seen otherwise than wreathed in an inevitable smile. Orientals mask their faces in impassivity; the Western world gives individuality its play. I watched a wise-looking Japanese in the audience the other evening throughout the glittering changes, the shifting mazes of an Alhambra ballet, nor once could I detect by a flicker of that inscrutable countenance what its owner thought of this particular phase of occidental amusement.

The turbanned Indians, black-bearded Maharajahs, or thin-nostrilled, fine-featured Sikh officers that one sees occasionally this summer at cricket matches at Lords, or driving in the Park, bear, to my alien vision, a confusing resemblance. They are true to type, while type is wiped away by cosmopolitanism from the streets of a great western city. Are they, in their turn, astonished, even repelled, by the unguarded way in which our countenances yield up their secrets,—by this avowed, unbridled egotism that stamps us and makes the African savage shrink from the ferocity of white faces?

I was passing down Regent Street yesterday with A., when suddenly at Piccadilly Circus a face was cast up to us like a foam-bell on a whirlpool: a moment, and the stream had swept it away. "Did you see that woman?" A. asked. "You know her?" I questioned. "Not in this life." I wasn't startled, he's a sort of modified Buddhist. "But I have known her somewhen, somewhere. I looked into her eyes and loved her, and she loved me." I laughed, and he laughed, knowing he was talking nonsense, but he meant it, nevertheless, for he added; "Things are going hard with her. I think she is unhappily married." He had never seen her before—not in this life, as he says; he will never see her again, in all probability, so I am not jealous.

The next turning brought us a face from the country that was like a nosegay. The blossoming may was in it; the breath of meadows new-mown; the keenness of morning airs that had searched it in many an upland gallop. All bloom and dew, freshness and fragrance, for there was a fragrance of the soul in this flower of a face—unlike so many pink and white young Englishwomen who are neither pretty nor handsome, but good and wholesome to look at, like a fine

plumping fruit or a prize-winning vegetable. They take the eye pleasantly enough, but go no deeper, leave no after-image in the mind. You cannot make a face out of features, fair hair and a fresh complexion. The reason Englishwomen have so much comeliness and so little beauty is that they have health instead of temperament. Much of her beauty the Irish peasant owes to temperament; and the prettiness of the young American is ascribable largely to the same cause: she has a vivacity, an intensity that gives her face the light of running water, instead of a certain stagnancy of expression one sees in the look, however limpid, of the average young English girl.

We were not long in coming to a contrast. It was past six when we entered the Burlington Arcade, and it was already filling with daubed masks like a painted plaster frieze mobilized from a temple of the Cytherean. There were no faces there, only these dreadful simulacrum, rouged and powdered and wearing an ineffectual grimace of joy.

It is abstinence that has given me this hunger for the human drama. The country faces are known, one has the key to their cypher. One does not surprise them suddenly

in vivid glimpses: they are not flung up startingly on the crest of an ebbing wave. Yet the strongest impression I ever received in a fleeting moment from any personality, came to me once, on Exmoor, with a rider who passed, following the hunt. I have never forgotten that keen, dark, feral face, with its accipitrine nose and piercing eyes; marked by elemental passions and elemental will. Would it seem so penetrating if I were to meet it here, now, in some crowded thoroughfare? But impossible to conceive of it apart from cloud and moorland, and the wild ancestral legend of the country of the Doones.

In the Academy, where certainly there was a large proportion of portraits, an acquaintance, calling my attention to the fact, said that painters were going in more and more for portraiture. "There's more money in it," was his sapient comment. "The best pictures here are portraits." The critic was not a connoisseur, but something in the city, so his opinion was not important. Certainly there was one portrait that made me realize the possibility of the crucial incident in Henry James' story, *The Liar*, and the way in which the whole psychology of that vain, fluent, braggart, mendacious

person was turned out on canvas for all the world to read, had not the hands of the loyal wife been so quick to destroy the record. Has any artist a right to placard all he knows, or thinks he knows, about us; to work portrayal that is betrayal? God is more merciful, and permits us to hide a little of ourselves.

There are faces one wants to take immediately away from the incongruity of traffic and turmoil, and weave around them a flowery trellis, or marginal ribands of poetic text, or set them against green meadows minutely starred, or blue hills and valleys sleeping in the sunshine, as did the Tuscan painters. One finds them in the unlikeliest places. While I was watching the languid comedy that held the boards at the Haymarket, the Painter, who was with us, touched my arm. "The third rose," he whispered; and as I looked somewhat puzzled, "You remember Rossetti's *Rosa Triplex*?" She was there, really, the third rose, in the person of a little vendor of sweets, leaning against the wall. A face so delicate, poignant, arrestive, so touched with wistfulness and weariness, and that shadow of the unseizable, the poet-painters drop over the faces of their fancy, that forthwith, the Painter and I forgot the

comedy, and absorbed ourselves in trying to capture the charm of that little waitress's face. Doubtless the mind behind it was commonplace enough; the snatch of talk I caught between her and another waitress when I lingered purposely in the aisle, fastening my opera cloak, was about the evening's sales; but I think there was in her, for all that, a restless little soul that had never used its wings, hopping from perch to perch.

The other face I have seen that held me—a far more memorable face—would have been a summons to another painter—Leonardo, this time, the psychologist, the trafficker in subtleties, the unraveller of the intricacies of the human spirit. There was a Renaissance quality in her, too—curiosity and disillusionment, scepticism and desire. A. spoke of her “Giacconda smile.” “Her Anaconda smile, you mean,” I said, wondering how many men the lady had swallowed in her time. She was the only woman I have ever seen, off the boards, in whom there was reptilian suggestion. When she stretched forth her throat, a throat beginning to be a little withered, in spite of its whiteness and fineness, it brought the serpent-change in Christabel's lady to mind.

Strangely enough, it was at the theatre that we saw her too, in one of the red-lined boxes. A playhouse gives such opportunity for poring on unknown faces, brings and holds them close. I waited impatiently for the curtain to go down and the lights to go up. At any time, in any place, such faces as hers are rare. They mean room for development, no hindrance or conflict impinging on them; just as great luxurious blooms mean the thinning out of life around them to favour growth. Life had favoured her in all material things: with the life of the spirit she had absolutely no concern. She had a certain easy air of having led captive the captivity of conventions, of being above conventions—they had not hampered her. All this was apparent, with the certitude of birth and breeding, ease of living and a touch of its satiety. But there was secreter writing in that face, too, some engrossment of the devices and desires of her own heart that she had followed with passion and imperiousness. She was now tasting the lees of the late forties, and, though she made no other grimace than one of tolerant amusement, they were not sweet in the mouth; as how should they be to any woman? And she was not done with it all yet, not quite

yet. . . . To look at faces like this is to have one of those concentrated moments of vivid, clairvoyant understanding that occur in dreams, when you are cognizant of a whole history, a three-volume novel, in the flash of an eye, at a glance.

The country has only a share in teaching me the value of faces. It is A., I believe, who really first awakened me to the great illustrated story-book of humanity which the town is, where one learns the text from the pictures. He is always touching my arm to say, "Did you see that man?" or "Look at that woman—there's a face for you—a face!" And in the old leisurely days of the horse-buses he would ride all day on top of a bus, watching the people on the pavements, gazing down into life.

I like to stand on one of the little "islands" in the street, where humanity collects like drift at an obstacle in the current, and see what the stream brings me. Sometimes I stand there while twice or thrice the policeman, lifting up his hand like Moses at the Red Sea, rolls back the tide of traffic and permits the chosen to cross in safety to the other side, until at last that functionary, naturally inimical to anything that departs from the strict norm of human conduct,

views me with uneasiness. One came up and asked me if I would cross, and when I said "I like standing here watching the people," he had not any longer any doubt: he knew I was mad.

XXVI.

BUT for missing some things that have a short season of bloom, it's rather a good idea to go away and leave one's garden for a few weeks. I get cross with the buds for taking such an unconscionable time when I am here to watch them. But when we got back, it was like magic: the sweet-peas were half up their sticks and waving like so many gay buntings hung out in our honour. Now at last I could see whether they justified their praises—Maud Holmes, Clara Curtis, Constance Oliver, Masterpiece, John Ingman, and the rest! Would they be good and do their best for me? I jumped out of the carriage and ran to them—before I greeted the cats—walking down the rows and holding roll-call to see if they answered to name.

Some were lovely as my dreams, and others a very poor match for the hues fancy had painted them, so they are badly paired in places. I wish I had put Flora Norton next

to Thomas Stevenson—really, it's like arranging a dinner-party, who shall take who in—they would have got on beautifully together. Although Flora was described as “the best of the blues,” I had visions of a dark navyish blue I once saw, and relegated her to the back row ; whereas she turns out to be a lovely cool shade of what I should call bluish-lavender. And to think that I gave the head of the table, as it were, to that muddy-complexioned, purplish vulgarian Tennant Spencer ! She looks enough like *Lathyrus Latifolius* to be the latter's own daughter, though of course they are not very closely related. That Everlasting pea ! It crops up in all parts of the garden ; I tear it out by the roots, and next week there it is again, grown almost as tall as before. After three or four up-rootings, seeing that it is regarded as a criminal, it goes into hiding and assumes aliases and disguises. It creeps up through the ivy leaves or among the honeysuckle, sheltering behind any plant that it can find, and I don't suspect its presence until one day I spy the detested foliage among the leaves of its protector—too strong and lusty for longer concealment. It has both cunning and effrontery. As it was the first thing showing above ground in

the spring, it will be the last the frost touches. Somebody sowed it here once, and the evil that they did lives after them. Somebody who did not grow sweet-peas, for no sweet-pea lover could bear to have the thing, except possibly for purposes of experiment in cross-fertilization. No pea could ever live down the prejudice created in my mind by mere resemblance to it, and Tennant Spencer shows another of its vulgar qualities in a tendency to ramping growth.

There's a sad tangle of tendrils and interlacing of stems, for the moment my back was turned they took their own way. Mr. Walter Wright, in whose book on sweet-peas I invested, says that he believes sweet-peas from the moment they come through the ground are aware whether props are near them or not, and receive a sort of moral encouragement—those are not his words, but it is to the same effect—if twigs have been provided. There are vegetable intuitions of the kind—we have recent scientific testimony to the fact—but if sweet-peas have them, then are they possessed with a very devil of perversity. They are harder to manage than marriageable daughters, neglecting the most obvious opportunity of being properly supported for life, to twine round some broken stick from

which their affections have to be diplomatically disengaged. Hours did I spend mending my peas and ques, brushing the ringletty tendrils carefully round the most suitable twig, only to find them all in disarray next morning, clutching at each other's hair or reaching out after some weed that I had overlooked.

They take more kindly to string, and, I surmise, to trellis-work, than to sticks. I have one short row on hemp string that by chance has grown up harp-shaped, from the short treble strings of salmon "Melba," through the ringing crimsons of "The King" to the dark "Nubian" at the top. A harp of many colours, on which the summer winds play, plucking at the chords and evoking harmonies of colour and scent.

I begin to understand why in England the worship of sweet-peas is not only a cult but a religion. It is an education of the colour sense to know them, and requires the eye of an artist to discriminate between the several sun-proof crimsons, the many mauves, the various soft suffusions of pink on cream ground. Then there is a deal of talk in garden magazines about arrangements of sweet-peas and the making up of "schemes," but I find when I go out to gather my

basketful in the morning, every delicatest sense of me drenched with pleasure in this bath of colour, that no studied arrangement is ever so happy as those casual mixed handfuls of every conceivable shade that mingle as free from discrepancy as the silks in a brilliant piece of Japanese embroidery.

The approved way is to use a few harmonized varieties in long stemmed vases, with a setting of dainty gypsophila, like filigree work between jewels. But being blessed with more than I know what to do with, I took a suggestion from Mrs. Candace Wheeler and had a piece of tin gutter-pipe, the length of the mantel-shelf, stopped at its open end. I put a strip of wire-netting inside and proceeded to "run the chromatic scale up" from the silver-grey of Azure Fairy, through the intermediate blue minors of Flora Norton, to the rosy lilac of Master-piece, like the cold sky of dawn warming into flush; the rich cream of Clara Curtis merged into Evelyn Hemus of the tinged edge, and the faintly blushing standards of Mdme. Routzahn; and so on into a crescendo of crimson.

I have a few rogues, but I believe that sweet-peas have a tendency to roguishness early in the season before they settle down

steadily into their varieties. There is one delightful sport in a pink flake—"a dainty rogue in porcelain"—and if she turns out to be anything valuable, I shall call her Clara Middleton.

The sweet-pea is a flower of great personality ; I don't know whether it is for this reason that the majority are named as if they had visiting-cards, or whether so naming them has contributed to the effect. Roses are named in the same way, yet they do not inspire me with the same feeling of intimacy. There is much in the name. For those I call by their first names, Evelyn and Maud and Miriam, I have a peculiarly tender regard, while to Mrs. This and Lady That I bear a slightly more formal relation, to say nothing of the Countesses, Duchesses and Princesses, the Kings and Queens that hold one at a distance. "The King" moves my allegiance, I confess, more than "King Edward VII."—the last evoking associations of frock-coats and top-hats ; whereas "the King" is an antique king, typical and pictorial, red-robed and crowned, sitting in the open to administer justice, the blue sky behind him, a canopy over his head. "No need such kings should ever die."

Had Tennant Spencer been a full name,

instead of a surname welded with that of a whole class of flowers, I should not have dared speak of it as disrespectfully as I have without apprehensions of a libel suit ; at least I should feel that I had been unwarrantably personal. As for Miriam Beaver, Vernon fell in love with her the moment I mentioned her name. "Miriam Beaver, Miriam Beaver," he kept murmuring like a song, "I'll bet she's a beauty." He was quite disappointed to hear that she was pink ; he had expected her to be dark and glowing.

Some lilies that I didn't know were here have come up in one of the garden borders ; the bulbs must have lain in the ground. Next year I must have lots of lilies, rosy *Lilium Krameri*, on the knoll under the trees ; tall white ones among the larkspurs. The very word is lovely : cool, liquid-sounding, with its limpid vowels and its sliding consonants. I remember how persistently I used to mis-spell it—lillies—from some unconscious feeling that I liked the tall ll's springing out of the lowlier vowel clusters, as stalks out of the leaves—a word that seemed to sway and waver if you breathed on it, so graceful it was. Rossetti had a passion for it, I think. Love-Lily was a "heart-remembered name" he linked for

sheer purity and stateliness of sound. He loved to paint them, too. You can see that sentiment has entered with botany into naming them—*Lilium Auratum*, *Lilium Candidum*, the pious English names, Madonna Lily, Annunciation Lily, the French *l'épée de la Vierge*. I have one Madonna, standing tall and white with a bud on her arm. I can fancy the bee going into it as into a cathedral, brushing the dust of profaner blossoms off his feet that he may not defile its glimmering floors, its golden altar, in that interior heavy with incense.

There's no longer a doubt in my mind: roses, carnations, larkspurs and lilies, with a sprinkling of poppies, the delicate Shirleys and the larger fringed ones, are the scheme for these old-fashioned box borders, against the mellow brick walls of this old house.

The little cabinetmaker, who is so keen a gardener, has a hundred or more *Lilium Candidum* all in bloom at once. A garden of lilies! Nothing could be more decorative; the whole place lies under a spell, as it were sainted by that fairness and grace and quietude. All other flowers have pictorial beauty, but the beauty of lilies is sculptural. I wonder if that is why they are the flower of death?

The house that belongs to the white lily garden is a new house into which its owner moved only last year : a modern sham-Elizabethan structure with plastered and timbered exterior and leaded panes. It has never been named as yet, and oddly enough I have been consulted in this matter of the name.

"Call it Sesame," I said : "Sesame because there are so many lilies."

And seeing by a blankness of expression that this did not elucidate, I referred the little cabinetmaker to his friend the fishmonger, who is a great disciple of Ruskin, and quotes that authority often and eloquently in his weekly advertisements.

The roses haven't done well in this dry spring and summer ; the Ramblers should have thrown up great juicy shoots but they haven't stirred ; not though I buried the surplusage of kittens at their roots—it's nourishing for the Ramblers, and nicer for the kittens to be reincarnated in the rose.

XXVII.

I REMEMBER how incredulous I once was on hearing allusion made to a drought in England, not dreaming I should see the confirmation within two years' time. For weeks and weeks and weeks it has not rained. There are no more of those washes of cool turquoise and amethyst that were wont to bathe the hills: a white haze hangs there; the distant woods look as if milk had been spilled on them; the very heavens are cloudless and colourless, dulled by a thin, whitish glair, like the opacity that deadens the blue eyes of the aged. Not even the dews of midnight dispel that film; it drinks the splendour of the moon and leaves a listless orb.

The vegetables are shrivelling and dying, and so are my flowers: you can see how the hot iron of the earth pinches their poor feet. As soon as the sun begins its descent, the gardener and I seize our watering-cans, and one of the villagers comes every evening to

increase our corps. Most of the things have given up trying to bloom: they have no sap or substance for blossom, nothing for luxury; all is devoted to the bare necessity of keeping alive.

Instead of growing up they grow down, burrowing deeper and deeper, groping after moisture in the soil, tugging in vain at the earth's dry breast: and in the air of mid-day is a smell of green things having their vital essences sweated out by the sun.

So hard-baked is the soil that the moles, unable to mine, have tunnelled along the water-course from end to end, turning the contents of my rockery upside down, as I turn out the drawers of my dressing-table when searching for something in a hurry.

Old Johnny has brought his traps and set them, muttering imprecations upon "them jolly things." "While I be standin' here, I see 'em a 'eavin' and a 'eavin'—a 'eavin' and a 'eavin'," he repeats with such melancholy emphasis that A. is misled.

"What does he mean by 'a 'eavin' and a 'eavin'?' Does he mean when they're caught in the traps it makes them—sick?"

"The earth, not the moles, oh, stupid!" I cry amid inextinguishable laughter, convulsed by the image that between them they

have evoked—the image of all the little moles violently affected as by a Channel crossing.

Our stream lies all on one side of its bed. Its voice has sunk to a lip-murmur. The naiad must have shrunk to the elfin stature of the nymph of that tiny flow that Stevenson chronicles on Halkerside. All its secrets are laid bare—pools the eye could never plumb before. It looks naked and ashamed; and when it is again in spate, it can no more deceive me with that deep, self-communing note, and shadows hinting of mysteries and depths. The trout has not where to lay his head; the pike crawled up yesterday to where he used to lie among the big stones above the footbridge and tucked his nose out of sight like an ostrich, leaving his long body swaying about in plain view, so that I nearly captured him with my hands.

The sheep huddle into a splotch of shade under a tree, shifting as the shade shifts; the calves in the meadow stand pashing in the brook; the water slipping over the mossy stones is the one suggestion of coolth, and this afternoon, when the soles of my feet were burning from the hot plough-shares of the garden walks, I sat down on the bank, pulled off my shoes and stockings and waded

in. It was delicious ! I had the same thrill I used to have as a child when I waded in mountain streams, and the cold sand wriggling between my toes and the water rippling against my ankles felt like things alive. I had the same desire to squeal—in fact, I think I did squeal.

The hour for tea arrived and found me paddling absorbedly. The very thought of steaming tea was insupportable. In a world of temporal imperfection if you have a stream of your own to paddle in, you must be content to live several wasteful miles from the fish-monger's supply of ice, and the possibilities of a tinkling lemon squash.

I said I would have tea later, but presently came Lucy to the edge of the lawn with a tray containing cake, thin bread and butter and the inevitable tea. Cup in hand, I waded and feasted, like a heron in the shallows, and thus engaged, became aware, too late, of the approach of footsteps. I looked up, expecting to see the gardener or a farm-hand, and beheld Mrs. Willesborough-Wolfe, who at last, in her good time and pleasure, and not as one given too readily to countenancing the newcomer, had condescended to call. And this was her reward—to find a bedraggled hostess barefoot in the brook !

Though I knew the lady by sight, I had never met her. Nevertheless, she must know who I was even in so unusual a situation. She behaved with perfect discretion: looking neither to the right nor left, she moved majestical to the front door and sounded her arrival.

For a moment utter panic seized me, and I had half a mind to crawl under the bridge. It would hardly have been to increase the dignity of my position, so I sat down on a projecting ledge of the rockery and dropped my offending feet in the trout hole.

I heard Mrs. Willesborough-Wolfe inquiring if I were at home, and I divined rather than saw Lucy's hesitation. How was she to say that I was out while I sat there in the tail of her eye? Yet she has all her class's reverence for the proprieties. She decided to say I was in, for Mrs. Willesborough-Wolfe disappeared into the portal, and I, slipping in at the back door, made a hasty revision of my toilet.

The prologue had taken some time, and Mrs. Willesborough-Wolfe's visit was of the prescribed duration and no longer. I tried to carry off my escapade lightly with a passing reference thrown out to catch the humour of the visitor, but Mrs. Willesborough-Wolfe,

to borrow a phrase of George Ade's, was "perfectly unconscious and determined to remain so." She made no sign except to sheer hastily away from a subject which she could not permit herself to treat with levity.

Soon after her carriage appeared at the gate she rose to go. She had sent her coachman somewhere with a message, it seemed, while she walked down the lane, by an unhappy chance, for the scrunching of the wheels upon the gravel would have saved me. She said—in the face of the brazen sky—she said she thought it was going to rain and she must hurry. Far off, it is true, there was a faint thunderous rumble of artillery practice at the Fort.

If only there could be a shower, a thunder-storm, some breaking up of Nature, to relieve the dryness of Mrs. Willesborough-Wolfe, the permanent drouth of her soul! I don't believe she ever paddled, not even when she was a little girl with fat, pink—but this is profanation, a profanation of that august personality.

* * * * *

It is a perfect summer for cricket, and A. is now Captain of the Kynaston Cricket Club, which, in the eyes of the village youth, makes him a great man; caps are doffed to him

with punctilio and respect, while, since his century of last Saturday—110 runs not out—the small boys hang around to do him service, and one urchin, investing his fortuitous penny in sweeties, carries his offering secreted about his person in the hope of meeting his hero, practising a stoical self-denial, and when he does meet with him, proffers the tribute on a grimy little paw.

In addition to the cricket he gets here, A. has retained his membership in his old club at H——, and bicycles there once in a while. He reads cricket, talks cricket, plays cricket, dreams cricket. With the first hint of warm weather, I find him in the little room devoted to his bags and sporting togs, brooding over his bats, passing his fingers lovingly down their satiny sides, softly placing imaginary strokes against imaginary balls; and the mania grows and deepens with the advancing season. I, also, am not without my weaker reflex of enthusiasm. Once or twice, before the summer is over, I shall dispense the hospitality of cakes and tea on the cricket-ground. Nothing has ever made me so at home in this community as to sit there and feel the interest and keenness of the cluster of onlookers; to hear their cordial applause of some smacking shot of A.'s; their

deep-drawn breaths of suspense and long "A-a-ah's" of satisfaction as the ball soars or skims to the boundary, myself covered with the kudos of this successful performance. At first there was an undercurrent of jealousy of the outsider among the wives and sweet-hearts of the best bats, but now I am sure of their sympathy, even when the Captain is caught out.

I should be grateful to cricket, if I had no other reason to love it, for taking up Saturday afternoons and sparing me a few tennis-teas. These festivities bear heavily upon me; I don't play tennis, and mine is the harder task of sitting in the audience, keeping the ball of idle conversation in the air. Local gossip is a sealed fount to me; London talk meets with no response, and my small knowledge of gardening is a god-send. How often do I feel, like the professor at the party, confronted with a debutante: "Perceiving that we have nothing of importance to communicate to one another, I wish you good evening."

"Did it bore you very much?" A., who has enjoyed his game, always asks as we are going home, with that air of solicitude with which we enquire of the patient just released from the dentist chair. It bores me till I

ache, except when I overhear them talking about *us*—a satisfaction I have more frequently than not, with my keen ears—and then I am amused.

It's so inhumanly stiff and formal, this provincial English society; all the people wired with conventionality, like flowers in an old-fashioned florist's bouquet. There is no vivacity, no graciousness, no animation: one doesn't expect big talk, but there is no reason why the small-talk should be so dull. Ease is an impossible condition to realize where the gulf between the sexes is bridged only by a sentimental attachment, or the family tie. The segregation of the sexes at entertainments, where one would suppose they came together for the pleasure of each other's society, is a fact over which I never cease to wonder. When we go in to tea the men gather at one end of the dining-room, the women sit in a row against the wall. If you have previously met the woman who sits next to you, you talk to her in a low, toneless voice. I have to make mine lower, more toneless than the rest, since it is an American voice—one kind of American voice—and would betray me as an alien.

On the last of these occasions there were three curates and two vicars collected from

the clerical neighbourhood. One solemn, shaven young man officiated in passing the bread and butter with such a eucharistic manner that I felt it almost sacrilege to take a slice.

I return home obsessed with an unspeakable gloom. The bottom seems to have dropped out of life, and I am looking into the abysses of its unmeaning emptiness. In vain I argue with myself that I have not been to a funeral, that I have not heard of the death of a friend, that no explicable calamity has befallen me. My spirit is weighed down, and the darkness is not lifted until next morning, when I take my hoe and go into the garden. It needs an hour or two of vigorous weeding to dispel the depression of a Kynaston tennis-tea.

XXVIII.

ON the hottest day of this summer I have had to go to London to meet a friend, new-landed from the United States. A friend this time whom I really wished to see, but often I am asked to go hopping up to town to encounter some casual American acquaintance who thinks it would be pleasant to see a face she knows, and who, deceived by the scale of the map of Great Britain, conceives it but a step from the Metropolis to any quarter of the Kingdom.

Going, there was plenty of room. My fellow-travellers—there were but two—knew each other: one was the cheery, buxom wife of a small farmer, on her way to Southampton to say “good-bye” to a son sailing for “the States,” and exchanging by the way with another small farmer data about potatoes, turnips, hay, and other market produce.

The return was less comfortable. In a third-class carriage, tucked in between two

other straining trains in Charing Cross Station, with the mercury tip-toeing in the thermometer, you "render" the essential qualities of human nature as the cook renders fat in her frying-pan. Murder will out, or its modified equivalents, through the pores, in all those subtle antagonisms, egotisms and antipathies of which humanity seems compounded. Heat is the revealer, the betrayer—witness the stripped and lurid passions of the tropics, their emotional exaggerations, as compared with the reserves and suppressions of colder climates.

Not only was the carriage crowded, but all the occupants were women, and both facts contributed, I think, to raise the temperature. In one corner was a lady in the later fifties: she might have been handsome once, indeed she must have been to have fixed the conviction of good looks so enduringly in her vanity. She wore an artificial smile, an ineffaceable simper, tried on and fitted, once and for all, over her slightly projecting false teeth, which probably did not admit the play of more spontaneous expression. The dentist apparently had supplied the smile with the teeth: you wondered if he charged extra. To emphasize her utter unfamiliarity with third-class people, she put up her glass and

inspected us frankly, as a new and curious species. Mingled with her undisguised contempt for third-class passengers was a certain supercilious amusement at finding herself in such a galley—" *Que fais je*" . . . ? she plainly asked, and she and her familiar self—that self of comfortable, upper-middle class status and pretensions—relished the situation as something of a joke between them.

A young woman got in with a baby in her arms. The lady in the corner made a protesting murmur and movement to indicate that there was no more room. But the young woman's relatives were not coming. They stood outside the door until the train started, discussing an approaching marriage in the family. There had been recent death as well, for their relationship was established not only by uniformity of feature, but unanimity of woe: they revelled in all the luxury of grief, even their beads and bangles were of the deepest sable. The interests of this family clearly centred in the engrossing, if primitive, events of birth, death and marriage.

Once the train was in motion, the superior person showed a lively dislike of "blacks." From the solicitude with which she flicked away each particle of soot and cinder, it was

evident that she regarded them as another of the contaminating contacts of this journey. Her anxiety to keep herself unspotted from the world impelled her to draw up the sash a notch or two.

At this her perspiring vis-a-vis turned a supplicating glance upon her daughter, who responded valiantly :

“Madame,” said she, “to have that window closed would be unbearable. My mother could not stand it. If the dust annoys you, you may change places with my mother.”

But she who occupied the corner was not one to forego an advantage or confer one. Any of the panting nine would gladly have changed places with her for the sake of the wind in the face, “blacks” or no “blacks,” and opinion was against her in regard to the window. She was hopelessly in the minority and she knew it. But with every tunnel that gave her the right, up went the sash with a vindictive bang that came near to shattering the glass, and following our emergence into daylight, an interval of suspense, tantalizingly prolonged, almost to the point of provoking protest, before her hand lingeringly released the strap and the window dropped again into its socket. A young girl with a gentle face, who sat next the

superior person, rose, offering to exchange seats with the hectic and heated lady whose daughter had interposed.

“You’ll get more air if you sit here,” she insisted. This young woman seemed given over to the performance of unselfish deeds : already she had untangled a brooch from the veil of one fellow-passenger, and stooped to pick up the parcels of another. Perhaps she belonged to a Band of Mercy, or some such organization. The safety of the baby gave her acute concern.

He was a large, round-eyed baby, filled with indiarubber fibre, like a golf-ball. The vain show of this fleeting world outside the windows had detained his attention for a bare fifteen minutes, after which he alternately applied for and petulantly repulsed refreshment ; proved his rubber-ring a delusion and a snare ; inventoried the claims to interest and consideration of those around him, dismissing them as negligible ; and, having exhausted the stock amusements of a baby in the lap, took to doing acrobatic turns. The plump little mother swayed and nodded where she sat, her arms hanging slack about the bounding, contorting little body on her knee.

The gentle-faced girl looked her anxiety,

and every woman in the carriage leaned forward alert and watchful, moved by a common impulse. Even the superior person condescended to notice, though she viewed the dozing mother with the reprobation one feels for the sentinel who sleeps on duty. But I am sure the gentle-faced girl took account of the broken nights the mother of so athletic a baby must spend, and made allowances.

The train stopped with a jerk : the baby gave a leap like a trout on the line, and all the women thrust out saving hands. The unslumbering mother-instinct, deeper than sleep, more central than consciousness, was on guard : instantly the arms clutched and tightened, and the baby's mother wakened with a start.

She took an orange from her bag, peeled it, inserted a link between the baby's lips, and thus provided us with a new suspense. It was the benevolent young woman who first thought of it, I believe, and by some telepathic suggestion conveyed the idea to the rest of us. There we sat while the mother drowsed, waiting for the moment when the baby should choke upon a seed. So tense were we, and so expectant, that we forgot to be hot and impatient for our destinations. Only the superior person failed

to share our collective anxiety ; it mattered little to her whether the baby choked or not, so that its fretting was appeased.

The last act of the benevolent young woman was characteristic. Her parcels were gathered together and she was all ready to alight when she made her discovery.

“It’s a seedless orange,” she announced aloud.

Stations came rapidly after that, and the carriage was soon emptied. The baby and its mother got out at the next stop. The superior person and I had the same terminal point. I saw her climb into her dog-cart behind the station’s shelter, and I felt how glad she was that walls of brick and mortar hid from her coachman the knowledge that she had travelled down third-class.

XXIX.

LAST night it rained ! All the afternoon it brooded, breathlessly still, the wings of thunder trailed low about the earth, hatching the storm. With evening it broke. There is to me, who have known storms that are storms, who have seen the blade of the lightning rip the heavens like a tent, and the hurricane loosed, something curiously ineffective about thunderstorms in England, a great striving for effect with little result. I said so once to an Englishwoman, and I believe that ever since she has piously expected me to be struck by an avenging bolt.

Last night the thunder was louder and the lightning sharper than usual. And, oh, the freshness ! the good smell ! As if the earth's hot brow were being bathed with some cool, pungent scent.

This morning the sun shines again, but on a world that has drunk deep and is refreshed : no longer parched and gasping.

Up from the green sea-valleys
 That the wild white horses range;
 Up from the ocean-pastures
 That the foam steeds ravage and change,
 The Storm-God gathers his cloud-herd
 And drives them away at his will—
 The wild white horses of India
 That have stooped and drunk their fill.

He herds them up heaven's steep hollow,
 Sprung sheer from the low sea-marge;
 The sky is filled with their thunder,
 The terror of their charge :
 Is filled with the sweep of squadrons,
 The shout of the Storm-God's ire,
 Swift hoofs that strike from the sky-way,
 The flash of the levin fire.

Beneath them their wild sea-brothers
 Run raging, with tangled mane,
 To the call of the wild winds warring
 Through the serried ranks of the rain.
 But lo ! in the East it is dawning,
 And clear is the round of the sky,
 And sparkling the green of the sea plain
 Where the storm-herds have swept by.

Alone in the height of the heavens
 Unherded coursers run,
 Their manes are ashine with the morning,
 Their heels are shod with the sun.
 Ye may not harness the sea-horse,
 The cloud-steed goes free from his birth,

Yea, fiery and free are the stallions
That make her crops for the earth.

No steed that hath stood 'twixt the plough-stilts
And turned the brown earth back,
Had worked so rich a harvest
Or left such tilth in his track.

The sower prays for their passing
Where the cracked earth parches and peels,
And Life and Death for the Nations,
Run at the horses' heels.

I don't do it any more now, or only little snatches like this that come rarer and rarer, and thinner and thinner. One must be young to write verse. It's part of youth's self-consciousness, self-centralization: its intense subjectivity and capacity for suffering. Prose may be sandwiched in between the practical activities of life: for verse one must sit in some recess of woods with the mirror of the soul's meditation in hand, like the ladies that romantic painters paint. The delicate web of verse is only woven where no passing feet go to and fro to break the threads; the passing feet, for instance, of the butcher's boy and the greengrocer and the fishmonger. . . .

Perhaps it may be with me as I hope it is with the friend of whose death I heard yesterday. He wrote some very charming verses in his brief time, and I cannot but

believe that as the wandering dust of space is gathered up into new planets, ultimately the component elements of a dozen or so minor lyrists will be fused into one new singing star. How much better to be the $\frac{1}{1000}$ th part of Milton than all of poor A. P., graceful and delicate as his things oft-times were.

The creative yearning that only spoils paper and takes up, to no purpose, the valuable time of publishers and magazine editors, will one day, when it is an energy set free in the void, by its kinetic power draw together with other poetic energies yearning also with the strength of their unrealized earthly aspirations, and thus assembled, they will make a force so potent, so creative, that they will break their way into life again and set men listening to a song.

There's a long wait, doubtless, before the forces are amassed and harmonized. Shelley, I am sure, was made up of many small Greek singers, whose songs are lost amid the dust, whose souls were in a pained, incredulous revolt against their gods, of these and of moderns less eloquent than the flame of liberty in their own hearts—all these together made Shelley: while Keats was compounded of piping Sicilian

goatherds and lesser Elizabethans. Chatterton, I think, has not come back yet; he wanders like a comet in space, sweeping God knows what candent elements into his train, to burst on the world some day in a red blaze.

XXX.

THE wheel has come full circle, the cycle of our year here, from summer to summer—through summer and summer, I should say—and has run a spoke or two over, into what is October on the calendar but summer still in the air. The days are wonderfully mild, mellow and warm, a lingering farewell, tender with that compunction of parting that robs last words of all asperity. Not so much a parting, as the interval—shorter than some and longer than others—the interval of recruiting that marks every activity of a rhythmic world, a world diastolic, systolic, unsustained, that must remit to renew its powers of sensation, whether the sensation be a kiss, springtime, or life itself. Sleep, winter, death, these be three intervals by which life recovers its power of sensation, recruits its consciousness.

I cannot conceive the spring of lands that have no winter; the dawn of countries that

know no night; the life of worlds that feel not death: though it is possible there are worlds where life is sustentation rather than rhythm, a duration and not a pulse. I am too temporal to conceive it. I take my winter gladly (even if I did run away for a while last year) to get spring as a keen and fresh experience.

In the vast dome of deep azure, without a cloud, without even the merest pickings of a cloud's wing, a lark is rising, a white, twittering, twinkling star of song, striving to regain the sphere from which it slipped. In two days it will be November, and yet the lark is singing—a weaker song and less inspired, love is lacking to the uplift: it is merely his Memnonic soul that must salute the sun and the morning. How he twinkles, how he flashes white light from breast and wings, “like a diamond in the sky,” as the old nursery rhyme has it—a diamond is the wingèd stone, quivering on wings of fire, a humming-bird in crystal, a humming-bird congealed: like a dewdrop in the sky—Meredith calls him a dewdrop, Meredith who has expressed him as nobody else has expressed him, not Shelley himself—Meredith who has said all there is to say, mounted with him and “sung a kindred soul out to its face.”

The flight is wonderful as the song, more wonderful to-day, more crystalline. Mortal child of the immortal, born of blue ether and his father the sun, put out to nurse on the brown breast of earth, he is ever lineal to that lost parentage, ever struggling to win back his heritage on high. On a cloudy day of spring I have seen him pierce the grey vapour scarfing the sky, and far beyond and above it, through some rift, I have heard his triumph ringing to have found the blue. This morning the sun acknowledges him as its own: he is no longer a small brown bird of earth, he is a mote in the burning eye of day, a spark from its white central fire.

But as I look, as if without love to wing him, his aerial aspiration cannot lift him out of sight, absorb him into the ineffable, he shoots down in a silver curve, a suicidal star, a breaking meteor—and—can that sober, speckled creature, foraging in the grass, be he, really he? Can the desire of the moth for the star be so quickly converted into the desire of the star for the moth? This sordid necessity for food brings us all to earth; no wonder the saints and ascetics insist that one must see God, fasting. In a few moments I shall have the voice of the cook at my

elbow, demanding to know what sweet she must make for dinner.

The first skylark I heard gave me a shock of disappointment; it is the numbers of them that count, as it is with the daisies and buttercups in the meadows. I have grown since to love that multitudinous music, as if a great sprinkling-can from the meridian were spraying the world with thread-like streams of song, so showering, so cool, so typical it is to me of those attempered English skies from which it falls; so unimpassioned, so impersonal, singing the glittering generalities of dewdrops, and sunshine and green fields.

The skylark sings of the weather, the nightingale sings of his heart; the lark sings a universal joy, the nightingale a personal sorrow. The lark is water, the nightingale fire.

“From tawny body and sweet, small mouth,
Feeds the heart of the night with fire.”

I have heard an Englishman prefer the lark to the nightingale, and I could understand the basis of that preference, as if to him the nightingale were too foreign, too exotic, too much in the Italian tenor style. For with the nightingale is *l'amour*, *toujours l'amour*, whereas the lark will sing as

long as the warmth lasts, with a wider range of interest if less intensity of expression, as though he said "Love is good, but not the only good ; as long as earth is beautiful, and there are sunshine and late flowers and blue depths of air, we can be happy, or at least content." . . . We can, indeed ! How right you are, brave singer of the Cosmic strain, as opposed to all sensuous individualism.

To-day we are gathering the pears from the oast : with mid-day the bandit wasps are still abroad ; the greener fruit they pick and pock, the mellower they gut, leaving the brown skin hanging like a bag upon the stem. To-day, too, I and the gardener are to put in the bulbs. It isn't time to plant the roses—next month for that. We haven't enough yellow roses, so I'm adding, by a friend's advice, *Mélanie Soupert*, *Marquise de Sinety* and the new *Duchess of Wellington*.

Last year we made our plans and preparations timidly, tentatively, not knowing what change the winter would work in our minds : I feel now that I shall stay here for ever—that I belong. It may be that in the year I have set my mark on the place, but far, far less than it has set its mark on me.

I am learning to see with the eyes of this old house. Already they have coloured

my outlook on life, they that are so full of colour, not transparent merely, like modern plate-glass. They never shine—their dimness drove one window-polishing handmaid desperate, and she had rubbed two or three of the panes out of the leads before her zeal could be curbed. They never seem mere windows ; they lack the merciless hard clearness of the modern view. They are clouded with memories and visions : they are tender with ancient wisdom ; they are hallowed at times—“like the windows of a chapel,” as people say.

To stand outside in these late October evenings and see them flush with haloes of the lamps, is to look on something sacrosanct, a place fit for aves and litanies to be chanted, that our secular life and pretty purposes profane. To lean on the gate and gaze at the dining-room casement glowing gules, “the red-litten windows” ; is like looking at the initial letter of an old missal ; a symbol heading a chapter of the past ; the key to some dead legend which, pore on it as I will, never comes plain. And earlier, before the lamps are lighted, looking out instead of looking in—for their outlook is fine as their insight—they are filled wonderfully with the blue dusk, bloomed with the grapey purples

of stained glass. Magic casements, opaque as a crystal from which its old enchantments have been only half wiped away. Morning does not expunge all their magic, but leaves blue sky and white clouds, heaven in its entirety, held in their leaden frames.

They have known more troubled times, vigil, apprehension and midnight fear have peered from them into the dark ; you can tell that from the locks and bolts, the fortress-like wooden shutters, the iron bars. But they have lived out all these terrors and alarms into the peace of old age, and dim and dreamy they look into meadows where they have watched unnumbered generations of swallows play.

We have begun fires. There is enough edge to the days to set them going, the pleasant fires that are luxuries and not necessities. Now it is that the spirit of fire enters like an animation of the inanimate : now it is that a long ribbon of smoke unwreathes from the chimney and streams away in the morning air as briskly as if it poured from the smoke-stack of a ploughing ship. It gives a curious look of motion to the house, that seems to be sailing, sailing steadily on like some stout broad-beamed bark. So perfect the illusion of its voyaging

lent by that trail of moving smoke that I fail to realize it as stock and stone, earth-fixed and rooted fast. No, nor is it, in reality. In reality it has made many a trip and carried many a passenger on the voyage of life—some all the way to port—that port they saw, no doubt, as a celestial city standing against the light, with faces they knew along its quays. And we, the two last come on board, will it carry us so far? Hardly, I think. We have no vision of the city, nor do we regret it, nor any lying up in port, however celestial. Rather would we be sure of a round-trip ticket by which we merely re-embark—perhaps on cruises more adventurous than this of the odd farmhouse.

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